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FRAMES OF DOMINATION

Connecting the Chaining of Aboriginal 'Prisoners' and Settler Emotions, 1900-1950.

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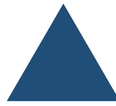
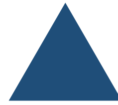


ABSTRACT: From the establishment of the first Australian colony until the mid-1900's, Aboriginal people were routinely forcibly restrained using chains by white settlers. Using two lenses, this article analyses a selection of photographs published in colonial newspapers, depicting this practice. It firstly examines how colonial photography constructed the Aboriginal body as an object of fear to be controlled by the frightened settler. This article also interrogates how these photographs appealed to humanitarian sympathies, which themselves were highly conditional, with comparisons to slavery embodying a 'safe' method of critique, one which did not challenge the settler colonial state.

KEYWORDS: colonial photography, Australia, fear, sympathy, First Nations peoples

Disclaimer: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this article contains images, and names of deceased persons in photographs and printed material.



Introduction

> "*So far as I can understand, the custom of chaining blacks has been practised from time immemorial, and within the present gaol it is the only safe way… If the natives had any more liberty than they have at present they would run away*" (Roth Report 1905: 54)

The expansion of the Australian colonial frontier occurred in concert with increasing carceral control and institutional violence against Aboriginal people (ALRC Report 133, 9 January 2018). Indeed, the establishment of the very first Australian colony accompanied practices of forcibly restraining Aboriginal people. This practice became systemic in early prisons (or 'gaols'), and was purported to prevent prisoners absconding, as it was supposedly "impossible to keep a native in custody without chaining" (Roth Report 1905: 44). Various methods of chaining were employed, including chains which were "attached to his neck and hands and wound round his body" (*ibid:* 13) and used "morning, noon and night – usually through the entire period of sentence" (*ibid:* 18). These neck chains often secured prisoners in groups, forming 'chain gangs', and could weigh as much as 3.1kg (Harman and Grant 2014: 166). With the onset of the 1900s, an increasing degree of concern attended chaining practices which culminated in Walter Roth's 1905 *Report of the Royal Commission on the Conditions of Natives 1905* ('Roth Report'), which condemned the use of neck chains. The recommendations were, however, widely disregarded and chaining continued until the early 1960s (Grant 2015), even after its formal abolition in 1958.

Contemporary Australian national identity, which rests on a bedrock of (white) Australian exceptionalism and 'progress', necessitates the "perpetuation of a singular collective amnesia" (Burke *et al.* 2020: 48) and the obfuscation of myriad brutal atrocities committed well into the 20th century. Despite this enduring tendency towards denial in Australia, the maltreatment of Aboriginal people was far from concealed from settlers during the early 20th century, with colonial

newspapers regularly printing photographs of chained Aboriginal prisoners from the early 1900s until the abolition of the practice. This article will analyse a selection of these photographs through two lenses: the emotions of fear, and sympathy.

Analysis of similar source material has explored the role of colonial photography in recognising and bearing witness to the suffering of Aboriginal people (Lydon 2010; 2012) and has investigated the ways in which such photographs perpetuated racist stereotypes (*ibid*). Through the utilisation of Ahmed's (2014) theory of emotion, this article aims develop the scholarship by exploring the roles of fear and sympathy in the construction of racist stereotypes through colonial photography. Firstly, I will firstly examine how colonial photography constructed the Aboriginal body as an object of fear and disgust to be controlled by the frightened, anxious settler. I argue that the visible restraint of Aboriginal people reified perceptions of them as inherently violent and primitive, and it communicated settler progress. Secondly, I will investigate how these photographs appealed to humanitarian sympathies, drawing parallels between the image of the chained Aboriginal and slavery embodying a 'safe' method of highlighting barbarity, without challenging the foundations of the settler colonial state. These images reveal how settler colonial desires bled into highly conditional humanitarian sympathies. In analysing only those photographs printed in colonial newspapers, connections can be made between the function of these images in orientating bodies towards and away one another, and the Australian nation-building project - a process to which the colonial newspaper was central (Putnis 2010).

Approaching Newspaper Photography

Photography historian and theorist John Tagg problematises a generalised history of photography and highlighted the importance of situating it within a "multiplicity of social sites and social practices" (Tagg 2009). For Tagg, photographs serve to animate meaning, not to discover it (*ibid:* 128). Consequently, meaning is not fixed, but rather determined by historians themselves (Bate 2016: 246). Sontag argues that a photograph can only become effective in informing a viewer if it is received within the context of relevant political consciousness (Sontag 2003). The viewer's

interpretation of the photographer's 'reality' is therefore impacted by the captions which contextualise it.

During the colonial era photography became "a gesture of domination […], a tool which participated in, and supported, the application of violence" (Foliard 2020: 28) and was thus a key instrument of the Australian colony. Its development enabled settlers to 'view' remote areas of the colonies which they were otherwise isolated from, thereby gaining knowledge about the people and areas photographed. The viewer and subject were brought closer through the construction of Indigenous People to colonisers (Twomey 2015). Such knowledge was deepened through the repeated publication of images of Aboriginal people in colonial newspapers, many of which depicted chained Aboriginal prisoners. Newspapers were an essential institutional element in the creation of the Australian nation (Putnis 2010) as they allowed those on the frontier to participate on a contemporaneous, regular and recurring basis in the wider imagined community (Anderson 2016; Putnis 2010). The increasingly widespread distribution was assisted by the 19th century technological developments (i.e. the rotary press and railways) which ensured that even rural communities were able to participate in this imagined community of the fledgling Australian nation. Whilst the earliest Australian newspapers could be regarded as "mouthpieces of their colonial governors" (McDonald 2023: 16), the next generation was highly politicised and by 1892 there were over 600 newspapers and magazines in circulation.

Importantly, it was often through newspaper coverage that settlers primarily came to 'know' Aboriginal people. What was 'known' was limited in scope as, despite the diversity of culture and language, Aboriginal people were presented as a homogenised, amorphous group – labelled as 'the problem'. Sections entitled 'The Blacks' were common (McDonald 2023: 27), featuring accounts of Indigenous violence under headlines like 'Affray with the Natives' (*ibid*). Images of incarcerated and chained Aboriginal people began to appear regularly in newspapers from the 1890s and, from the 1920s, were "an immediately recognisable symbol of ill-treatment" (Lydon 2012: 232). This illustrates how the relationships between the photographer, the subject and the viewer were steeped in asymmetrical colonial power dynamics and how the photograph itself often emerged from settler

fetishisation of a colonial encounter. Thus, when considering these images today, it is essential to avoid perpetuating the colonial gaze by divorcing them from the agency and history of colonised populations (Bate 2016: 246).

Theorising Colonial Emotions

Notwithstanding the centrality of 'western rationality' in the expansion of empire and its 'civilising mission', emotions formed a key part of the settler colonial experience (Pyenson 1993). In her seminal work, Ahmed (2014) argues that emotions do "not reside positively in a particular object" (Ahmed 2014: 64). Instead, she conceptualises emotions as "affective economies" (*ibid*: 44) which create surfaces and boundaries, allowing objects to be defined. Therefore, it is the contact between a subject and object which shapes emotions. In the colonial context, this notion of 'contact' is useful for understanding the emotions of settlers as they relate to Indigenous populations. Photographs published in colonial newspapers should be considered a form of 'contact' and, as such, influential in the shaping of settler emotions. Ahmed argues that narratives can stick to objects and result in a subject making a conditioned affective judgement upon coming into contact with an object (*ibid*: 211). These judgements and the stickiness of objects are impacted by past histories of contact. Emotions can be conceived of as performative: "They both generate their objects and repeat past associations" (*ibid*: 194) creating a so-called 'loop of the performative' (*ibid*: 194). The emotions of fear, disgust and sympathy were, I argue, pertinent to the interpretation of photographs of chained Aboriginal prisoners by settlers.

Fearing and Controlling the Aboriginal Body

Photographs of Aboriginal prisoners were frequently published in dedicated illustrated newspaper supplements, often alongside photographs of new infrastructures (Lydon 2010). From this photographic genre, themes of order and control emerge - which serve to communicate the idea of settler sovereignty and the superiority to the viewer. Order —specifically law and order— was a

core tenet of the 'civilising' goals of the Western imperial powers. The settler population in Western Australia at the time largely consisted of new European immigrants (Byers 1993), to whom the realities of frontier life were new and unfamiliar. Lester (2015) has convincingly argued that 'colonial anxieties' were structural and systemic aspects of the colonial life, and the degree of fear was such that the settler population was rendered utterly insecure (Laffan and Weiss 2012: vii). The colonial anxieties which characterised their daily lives stemmed from the frustration of trying to understand the environment (Fischer-Tiné and Whyte 2016). The 'unknown-ness' and unpredictability of this environment contrasted not only to the ultimate goal of law and order, but also to their rational self-image.

Bourke (2005) asserts that fear is fundamentally about encounters between bodies. This aligns with Ahmed's argument that contact shapes emotions. The degree of fear, however, cannot be attributed to encounters alone. Whilst the frontier was in some respects a genuinely dangerous place (Burke *et al.* 2020: 24), the magnitude was amplified by false reports spread through rumour and by the press (*ibid*: 24). The "strain and terror involved in contending with the unknown wilds" (Evans 1993: 29-30) and combined with fear of retaliation from those they had forcibly dispossessed, produced an atmosphere of fear and a sense of communal vulnerability (Burke *et al.* 2020: 22). The fact that fear does not reside in any particular object generates a senso of slipperiness, permitting it to stick to the specific *collective* bodies of Aboriginal people (Ahmed 2014: 64). The communication of sovereignty and superiority was reliant upon the reproduction and vindication of fear in a loop of performativity (*ibid*: 203). According to Weiss and Laffan, development, progress, certainty, order, stability and security can be conceived of as the antidote to fear (Weiss and Laffan 2012: 5). Therefore, through the publication of this genre of images, settlers could 'see' the order imposed on Aboriginal people in securitised settings, thereby assuaging their fears.

I. Reinforcing Primitivism

Notions that white settlers brought with them civilisation were founded upon the enduring stereotype of Aboriginal people as a "stone age race" (Lydon 2012: 224). Figure 1 depicts several labouring Aboriginal men, chained at the waist.

Figure 1. Photographer unknown. Natives at Work. "The Far North-West", The Australasian, 28 November 1908, p. 1378. Newspapers Collection. National Library of Australia.

This was standard practice, with prisoners being required to work whilst chained, often in quarries or construction, for up to 8 hours per day (Roth Report 1905: 19). It was argued that manual labour necessitated neck chains, as it could hardly be completed in handcuffs, and ankle chains were likely to cause the prisoner to injure themselves (Harman and Grant 2014: 165). The prisoners in Figure 1 are dressed in calf-length trousers and wide brim hats, with belts to which chains are attached. Though there were likely practical reasons for the lack of shirts, it is pertinent that this renders the scarification on their chests and backs visible. These scars are also highly visible in Figure 2, which was included in the same section of *The Australasian*.

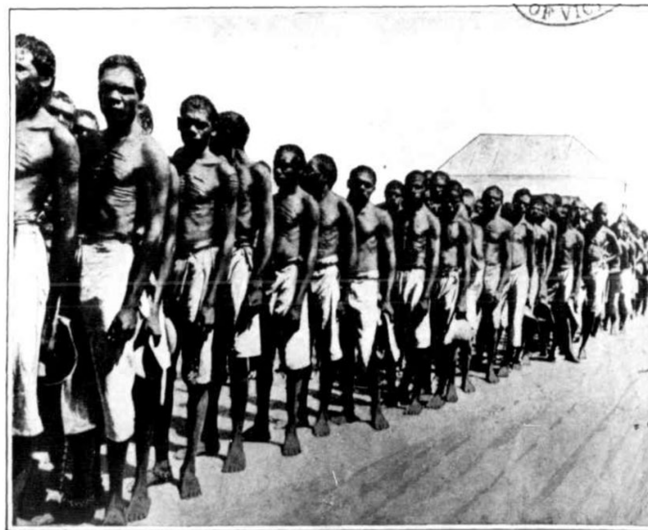


Figure 2. J. Thomson. Prisoners on their way back to gaol after a dip in the gulf. "The Far North-West", The Australasian, 28 November 1908, p. 1378, J Thomson. Newspapers Collection. National Library of Australia.

Scarification is a meaningful practice that was widely performed across Australia. Each scar was deliberately placed, told personal stories and identified social roles. In other words, they embodied the societal structures "by marking it in the very flesh of the individual and make him [*sic*] feel and experience it" (Thevoz 1984: 28-29). What a photograph may 'factually' portray, however, does not compel the audience to draw the same conclusion. Interpretation, and what viewers deem important, depends on the context in which an image is viewed and presented. In the colonial setting, "many newcomers misread the social and cultural significance of indigenous body marking and associated them with western punitive stigmatising practices" (Cole and Haebich 2007: 295). As neither the captions nor the article text remark on the scars, no context is provided. The publication of these images without context invited the viewer to deepen their fears, which were founded on the pathologising of Aboriginal people as under-developed and harbouring an intrinsic capacity for violence. Given that the "response of fear is itself dependent on particular narratives of who or what is fearsome" (Ahmed 2014: 69), erroneous settler interpretations of these scars as indicators of inherent violence fed into existing fears that settlers too would be the subject of this

violence. These marking were, therefore, likely considered manifestations of primitiveness, flagging the 'savage' tendencies of Aboriginal people to the viewer. This interpretation of scarification sharply distinguished the Aboriginals from the white settlers, indicating an 'otherness' and contributing to the production of fear which thereby justified the use of heavy chains. Therefore, chains were not perceived as an enactment of violence, but – paradoxically – as a tool for preventing it. The violence of this photograph further lies in divorcing scarification from its context. Embodying the logic of elimination, Aboriginal cultures were erased through the distortion and re-formation of the scars as imprints of barbarity (Cole and Haebich 2007: 295). Thus, each misinterpretation constituted a new instance of violence against these men. This highlights how it is those *least* in danger of violence who are most afraid (Ahmed 2014).

The accompanying article declared that "after natives have been in gaol a few months they present a comparatively well-groomed [*sic*] appearance".[1] This informed the interpretations of Figures 1 and 2, prompting the reader to imagine the men prior to their detention. The scars, reconstituted in the eye of the settler as indicators of primitivism, served as a visual reminder of 'before'. The gaolers have clothed the prisoners in markers of white, western 'civilisation', reassuring settlers that western sensibilities were in the ascendancy, and that Aboriginal ways of life—constructed as primitive and immoral—were being eradicated. In choosing these images, *The Australasian* communicated that though settler sovereignty was advancing, Aboriginal people were incapable of being entirely 'civilised', as they carried difference on the very surface of their bodies. The transgression "evoked deeper fears of a chaotic savagery that lay outside the control and bounds of the civilised world" (Cole and Haebich 2007: 202), and, therefore, efforts to remould the body of the Aboriginal people could not be entirely successful.

II. Order, Segregation and Containment

Figure 3 featured in a February 1905 edition of *The Western Mail*, a conservative rural weekly which often advocated the use of chains. It depicts tens of Aboriginal prisoners at Wyndham

[1] "The Far North-West", *The Australasian*, 28 November 1908, 1378. Newspapers Collection. National Library of Australia.

Gaol in North-Western Australia. The prisoners are chained in groups of three, with the chains fastened around their necks and secured using padlocks, accurately reflecting the general conditions at Wyndham.

Figure 3. Photographer unknown. *Aboriginal Bathing Gang at Wyndham*. "The Treatment of Aborigines – Prison Life in the Nor'-West", *The Western Mail*, 18 February 1905, p. 24. Newspapers Collection. National Library of Australia.

Importantly, this photograph–which is presented in a manner entirely uncritical of chaining–was printed in the immediate aftermath of the publication of the 1905 Roth Report. Therefore, considering the *Western Mail*'s long-standing support of chaining, the publication of this photo should be read as an effort to vindicate the practices criticised in the Report.

Notwithstanding the accuracy of the conditions depicted, elements of Figure 3 have evidently been constructed for the photograph. It is essential to be cognisant of such choices made in an image's composition (Butler 2016), which may have contributed to the decision to publish this image mere weeks after the Roth Report. The subjects have been precisely organised and are pictured standing in systematic rows and columns, all facing the camera. As this arrangement seems to have been done *for* the benefit of the camera, it seems intentional that this image evokes a sense of orderliness. This orderliness is mirrored in Figure 2, in which prisoners are standing in an organised queue. The presentation of a group considered 'wild' in the settler imagination, adhering to order while

in chains, implicates the chains in the production of that order. The fact that the prisoners are seen as 'under control' through the two-fold containment of the prison and chains, thus demonstrating their 'effectiveness', suggests that such treatment was an effective method of 'taming' the 'unruly' population. Consequently, the use of chains is reified as necessary to prevent inevitable escape, thereby vindicating the use of neck chains in the eyes of the settler population.

In exclusively capturing Aboriginal people, Figures 1 to 4 exemplify another dimension of orderliness - a strict adherence to racial segregation. There are no white settlers in these images, despite, for example, Figure 3 being taken at Wyndham Gaol, where there were both European and Aboriginal prisoners (Roth Report 1905: 44). The portrayal of strict adherence to racial norms communicated that white criminals were not to be associated with Aboriginal people, even in prison. They reflected wider society, in which interracial interactions were limited and occurred largely in carceral settings. Therefore, such photographs entrenched structures of the racial hierarchy - which was fundamental to the establishment of the setter colonial state. The absence of images of white criminals also indicates that it was not deemed to be in the public interest to visualise settler criminality. This acts to associate *only* Aboriginal people with criminality, and Aboriginal people with *only* criminality, in the public consciousness - in spite of Aboriginal people never constituting a majority of the prison population (ALRC 2018). Photographs entrenching racial hierarchy and the criminality of Aboriginal people informed what was believed about them. The delineation between settler and Aboriginal bodies allowed for the coding of the latter as criminal, whilst the former was coded as threatened.

III. Dehumanisation

NATIVE PRISONERS BATHING NEAR WYNDHAM JETTY
(Although alligators are numerous, they do not touch the natives.

Figure 4. Photographer unknown. Native Prisoners Bathing at Wyndham Jetty. "The Far North-West", The Australasian, 28 November 1908, p. 1378. Newspapers Collection. National Library of Australia.

Unusually for this genre, Figure 4 depicts prisoners in a more disorderly fashion, showing a large group bathing at Wyndham Jetty. This jetty, high up and out of the water, is where the white settlers would walk, avoiding the water below. The prisoners here are not only separated from the white settlers, but are immersed in the body of water the jetty was constructed to avoid. In capturing the physical separation of the two groups, the composition of this photograph therefore operates to subjugate its subjects. *The Australasian* has included the caption "although alligators are numerous, they do not touch the natives" (Figure 4). This flags one of the numerous fears held by the settlers - that of the new, dangerous animals in their new, dangerous environment and operates on two levels.

Firstly, it equates the Aboriginal population and the alligators. They exist in the same space physically, one which is avoided by the 'civilised', 'vulnerable' white settler. In highlighting a

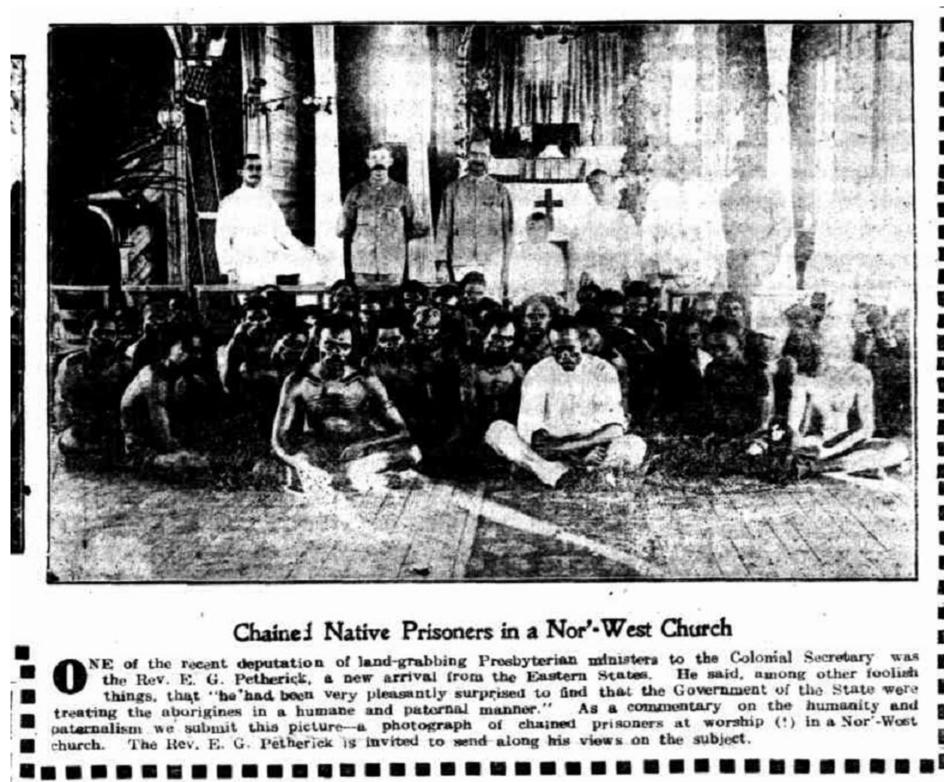
proximity between the prisoners and alligators, their lower position on the racial hierarchy is naturalised justifying their segregation and ill-treatment.

Secondly, the utilisation of this photograph to further the alignment of Aboriginal people with animals is a blatant example of dehumanisation. This perception that Indigenous Peoples were evolutionarily closer to animals than to the 'civilised' white man was a crucial tool of colonisation (Porteus 1931). The photograph implements the disgust, which is suggested to be the primary mechanism of dehumanisation (Rousseau, Gorman and Baranik 2023: 2). Disgust is an object-oriented emotion of superiority, meaning that subjects feel disgusted by bodies deemed inferior and, therefore, are repelled for fear of contamination. By highlighting that even the alligators do not touch the prisoners, the viewer was led to consider the prisoners as repellent in the extreme. This not only operates to suppress the population to the realm of the non-human, but also emphasises the need for strict segregation. Coming into contact with Aboriginal people would be read as contaminating for the settler population. Therefore, disgust worked to confine Aboriginal people to carceral spaces to eliminate the risk of contamination. The dissemination of disgust-inducing photographs acted to attribute the emotion of disgust to Aboriginal people before encounters occurred. The loop of performativity demonstrates the performance of emotions: when one subject reads another as disgusting, the subject is in fact filled with disgust, thereby confirming their initial reading (Ahmed 2014: 203). This works to explain the dehumanisation of Aboriginal bodies by white settlers.

With newspapers, the reproduction of the Indigenous man as animalistic occurs with each viewing on a massive scale across readerships. The norm to which the peoples indigenous to Australia do not conform has been constructed as the white Christian man. The violation of this norm also induced disgust. Figure 1, which highlighted the scarification on the chests of several prisoners, exemplifies this. The transgression represented by scarification was read as something repulsive and indicative of the less-than-human.

Humanitarian Sympathies

During the 1920s, photographs of the chained Aboriginal prisoner became a prominent symbol of ill-treatment (Lydon 2012: 232) and the advent of the League of Nations following the First World War brought with it a "renewed and vigorous interest in Aboriginal people" (Reynolds 2018: 184). Humanitarians often focused on the slavery question (e.g. Gribble 1905: 9) and used photographs to provoke outrage and garner sympathy in urban Australia and beyond. Halttunen (1995) asserts that sympathy is spectatorial in nature, meaning that the act of seeing rendered ill-treatment 'real' for urban audiences.


Chained Native Prisoners in a Nor'-West Church

ONE of the recent deputation of land-grabbing Presbyterian ministers to the Colonial Secretary was the Rev. E. G. Petherick, a new arrival from the Eastern States. He said, among other foolish things, that "he had been very pleasantly surprised to find that the Government of the State were treating the aborigines in a humane and paternal manner." As a commentary on the humanity and paternalism we submit this picture—a photograph of chained prisoners at worship (!) in a Nor'-West church. The Rev. E. G. Petherick is invited to send along his views on the subject.

Figure 5. Photographer unknown. "Chained Native Prisoners in a Nor'West Church", The Sunday Times Perth, 28 March 1909, p. 9 Newspapers Collection. National Library of Australia.

The movement towards perceiving the Aboriginal prisoner as an object of sympathy, however, was not linear. In the first decade of the 1900s Figure 5, which criticises the treatment of prisoners as inhumane, was published less than half a year after Figure 1 - which pushes the opposite narrative.

Crucially, Figure 5 was published in the *Perth Sunday Times*, which differed from its contemporaries, such as *The Western Mail* (Figure 3), in that it was considered a relatively radical newspaper (Byers 1993), purporting to oppose the political elite and support reform. Clearly, photographs have no inherent moral agency to stimulate sympathy. The emotions of viewers are highly dependent on how the photographs are discursively framed and on the emotional community (Rosenwein 2007) to which the viewer belongs. Such communities influence the historical emotional narratives that 'stick' affects to objects, which are taught as established values within particular emotional communities. If these values become dominant, they can turn into social norms.

Depicting Discomfort

Australian slaves

NOT imaginary Russian "slave camp" inmates, such as have Dr. Evatt's sympathy, but Australian Aborigines are here pictured in chains in a real Australian slave camp. They were held at Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia, for 18 months while police vainly sought evidence on which they could be tried for tribal murder. Then they were freed—but they had served 18 months' hard labor in chains for an offence which had not been proved.

Figure 6. Photographer unknown. "Australian Slaves", Workers Star, 14 April 1949, p. 8. Newspapers Collection. National Library of Australia.

Figure 6 is typical of images published in the late 1940s. Here, a small group of Aboriginal prisoners are pictured working whilst chained together. In the bottom image, two of the men are making direct eye contact with the camera, while the third seems to be holding the chain around his neck and looks distinctly uncomfortable. Both attributes would be uncharacteristic of earlier fear-provoking photographs. Especially the discomfort contrasts with earlier images, in which the prisoners were not portrayed as being affected by the chains. As objections to chaining increased, its proponents argued that chains were a more humane option as, for example, they enabled the prisoners to swat away flies whilst they worked. The visual evidence of discomfort here counters this aspect of the pro-chaining argument, and somewhat challenges the colonial ideas that Aboriginal people were less susceptible to pain due to their 'primitive' nature.

The Slavery Question

Figure 6 is explicitly framed through slavery and takes a degree of responsibility. Aboriginal prisoners were frequently referred to using slurs such as 'natives' or 'aborigines'. In the photograph, they are referred to as 'Australian slaves', subsuming the men in the Australian identity and inviting viewers to somewhat align themselves with the men in the image.[2] The appropriation of the slavery frame was extensive, and worked to make to label of 'slave' stick to Aboriginal people. In Figure 6, connections to the slavery frame can also be identified in the setting – a rural area that contrasts with the construction sites of many earlier photos. This choice of setting aligns the subjects with American slaves toiling in fields. Thus, the slavery connection was an obvious one to make (Paisley 2014: 104) and enabled discussion under an established precedent – that slavery was bad. For Paisley, comparisons with slavery suggested the "collapsing of very distinct histories" (*ibid*: 104), which in turn acted to obscure unique and particular violence of settler colonialism. The homogenisation of the Aboriginal 'slave' is evidenced by the repeated use of Figure 6 across a

[2] This subsummation still relates to the settler logic of elimination.

number of years. Clearly, the utilisation of such an image was not to record a specific instance of injustice directed at an individual, but rather served as a generalised icon of slavery and injustice imposed on a homogenised 'victim' population – a population in need of the white helping hand. This relied upon the proliferation of the notion of western 'advancement'. In 1927, *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* argued that:

> [I]f we recognise their rights […] at least we have the satisfaction of knowing that even in the eleventh hour we shall have endeavoured to redeem any neglect, indifference or maladministration in the past and to do substantial justice (*Anti-Slavery Reporter* 1927: 7, in Reynolds 2018: 194).

This signals that humanitarian organisations were still permeated with the notion that Aboriginal people were an 'inferior' race, and it was this belief which prompted sympathetic efforts of the 'superior' whites. The support for "more humane and enlightened treatment" (*Anti-Slavery Reporter* 1932: 95-97, in Reynolds 2018: 191) reveals that ill-treatment was considered unacceptable because the settlers perceived themselves as more advanced than such treatment would suggest. That the treatment was meted out "to a primitive race by a *civilised* nation" (*Morpeth Review* 1933: 29, in Reynolds 2018: 186) was unacceptable and evidently stemmed from the same stereotypes upon which feelings of fear and disgust were based. Such views underscored much of the 'care' and protectionism that was enacted as the new form of control. This illustrates how colonialism bled into humanitarianism and why the construction of Aboriginal prisoners as anonymous slaves in the national imagination should be considered a form of violence.

The publication of Figure 6, which aligns the men with slavery, was intended to provoke shock and outrage without igniting new and difficult discussions about the specific plight of Aboriginal people. Instead, the same practised sympathies and arguments could be recycled. Figure 6, whilst meant to shock, also remains within the realms of acceptability of the period. Lydon notes that this forms a stark contrast to the violence captured in the photographic record of the United States, for example, where photographs of lynchings constituted trophies and were commonplace (Lydon

2010: 245). The harsher treatment and the dispossession of land, from which it may have been harder for the average settler to extricate themselves from blame, remained concealed from view. This highlights how humanitarian sympathies are endowed with inequalities of power and work to perpetuate them. Consequently, whilst the diversifying of the frame to express humanitarian sympathies widened the information available in the emotional community, it was arguably still defined by the white man's implicit 'superiority' (Hillbrands 2021). Suski argues that sympathy, while capable of building an ethical connection, can simultaneously maintain relationships of power which obscure any genuine social connection between the humanitarian and the 'sufferer' (Suski 2012).

Conditionality

Figure 5 shows a group of chained prisoners sat on the floor of a church, heads bowed. A group of white men stand behind them, either side of a crucifix, separated from the prisoners by a physical barrier. *The Perth Sunday Times* states that this picture of "chained prisoners at worship (!) in a Nor'-West church" [*sic*] should be considered "a commentary on the humanity and paternalism" (*Sunday Times Perth* 1909: p. 9), responding to claims that the state government was treating the Aboriginal people in a 'humane and paternal manner'. Whilst this tone guides the viewer to interpret the photograph as evidence of *in*humane treatment, the selection of this photo to highlight ill-treatment indicates the conditionality of recognition of their suffering (Lydon 2012: 210). Whereas many photographs enabled the viewing of remote areas of the frontier, this one exemplifies the ability of photography to draw the subject and the viewer closer by locating the chained Aboriginal in a familiar setting – a church. This reduces both the physical and emotional distance, by placing them in a recognisable, 'moral' setting. This flagging of religion becomes more overt with the caption which identifies the prisoners as being "at worship". The affective judgements of humanitarians who came into contact with Aboriginal people were shaped by the sticky narratives of Christian humanitarianism, based on values of conversion, equality and the salvation of 'heathens'. Therefore, the assertion that the prisoners were partaking in Christian worship, speaks to how the 'benefits' of sympathy are bestowed only if efforts have been made to shed 'primitive pagan' behaviours and adopt the 'civilised' characteristics of the settler.

Religion was considered crucial in advocating for the liberation of Aboriginal people, with *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* asserting that with the church's support "the cause of all weak and depressed peoples throughout the world will receive fresh encouragement and reinforcement" (*Anti-Slavery Reporter* 1932: 95-97, in Reynolds 2018: 192). This reinforces the notion that sympathy was highly dependent upon notions of passivity which aligned with the framing of the Aboriginal people as "helpless, docile members of a 'child race' in need of protection by beneficent whites" (Lydon 2012: 216). The racial hierarchy remains unchallenged by this image – the composition of which draws on many of the same themes as other cotemporaneous photographs. Whilst there are white settlers in the image, they are visually distinguished from the prisoners in a multitude of ways: they are standing, whereas the prisoners are sitting; the settlers are clothed, and the prisoners are mostly not; the settlers are looking straight into the camera, whereas the prisoners are mostly looking at the floor – a distinctly non-confrontational pose. They are even separated by a physical barrier. Therefore, every part of the composition of this image speaks to the hierarchical nature of early 1900s Australia and demonstrates the conformity of colonial humanitarian photography to the hierarchical standards of the colonial visual economy. The utilisation of photographs as meek, anonymised symbols of slavery indicates the conditionality of humanitarian sympathy. A sympathy which, crucially, did not necessitate them to re-evaluate their identity as rightful occupants of a (stolen) land.

Conclusion

The analysis of colonial newspapers' photographs reveals two over-arching themes which aligned with colonial goals to "isolate, know and manage Aboriginal people" (Lydon 2005: xiv): order and control, and humanitarianism. Through the impression of orderliness, chains were perceived to be an effective method of containing a 'fearsome' primitive population. As order and progress counter fear, such impressions validated the imposition of regimes of control by the fearful and anxious settler. This illustrates how fear works to restrict the movement of 'othered' bodies. The contributions of colonial newspapers thereby reified white victimhood and perpetuated the "loop of the performative": by constructing certain bodies as disgusting and fearsome, those bodies were

subsequently perceived as such. By subjecting the ‘problem population’ to regimes of correction and control, settler sovereignty was consolidated.

That this same photographic genre was also used by humanitarians highlights their lack of inherent moral agency. The parallels drawn between the image of the chained Aboriginal and the slave trade made these images a safe method of evidencing barbarity without challenging the fundamentals of the settler colonial state. Thus, these photographs reveal the conditional nature of humanitarian sympathy, which relied on constructions of Aboriginal people as docile, primitive and desperately in need of the white, civilised helping hand. Instead of restoring dignity, they were used and re-used precisely because they allowed the chained Aboriginal prisoners to become a symbol, abstracted from their individual humanity.

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