

‘Stolen Children: Stolen Wages’:

Aboriginal women as reproducers and producers in white Australia.

This presentation may contain images and the names of deceased persons.

The presentation contains historical material that by today’s standards uses racist language.

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY
BUSINESS SCHOOL

Leanne Cutcher, Teresa Davis and Tilly Milroy



Government policies in relation to indigenous Australians have been and continue to be shaped by both ideology and **economic** utility.

The greatest advantage of young Aboriginal servants was that they came cheap and were never paid beyond the provision of food and clothing. As a result any European on or near the frontier regardless of their own circumstances, could acquire and maintain a personal servant (Reynolds 1990, 169).

The Protection Board advertised their Aboriginal maids in the *Australian Women's Mirror* in 1940:

“TRY AN ABO APPRENTICE!

..... has become one of the family and is worth three of the white maids we have employed”

(Goodall, 1990: 7).

Cheap Black Labour Akin to Slavery

They argued that such domestic help was essential to keep white women in the tropics. These unfortunate weather-beaten women, supposedly endangering their health and reproductive capacity by simply being in tropical conditions, deserved any 'little assistance' they could get. Unionists were all too ready to criticise the larger employers such as pastoralists and hoteliers for employing black labour, but had not apparently noticed they were doing so themselves. Perhaps this was because domestic work was associated with wifely, unpaid labour. (McGrath 1995)



*Afternoon tea at the Benson residence, Ruby Jones - maid - at left,
Wanaaring, NSW, 1906*

Courtesy: Bicentennial Copying Project, State Library of New South Wales

Narrative analysis

- › A reflexive ‘reading’ of the narratives allows us to explore “how they are produced, used and what meanings they may have, what they are seen to be or to represent culturally speaking” (Hodder 2000, 108).
- › *Testimonio* as a form of subaltern narrative :John Beverley(2004)- ‘petit recit’ ‘small voice of history’(Ranajit Guha)
- › *By testimonio we mean a novel or novella-length narrative in a book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also a real protagonist or witness of the event he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a “life” or a significant life experience. Testimonio may include, but is not subsumed under, any of the following categories, some of which are conventionally considered literature, others not: autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, novela-testimonio, nonfiction novel, or “factographic literature” ... The situation of narration in testimonio has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on. (Gugelberger 1996: 9).*

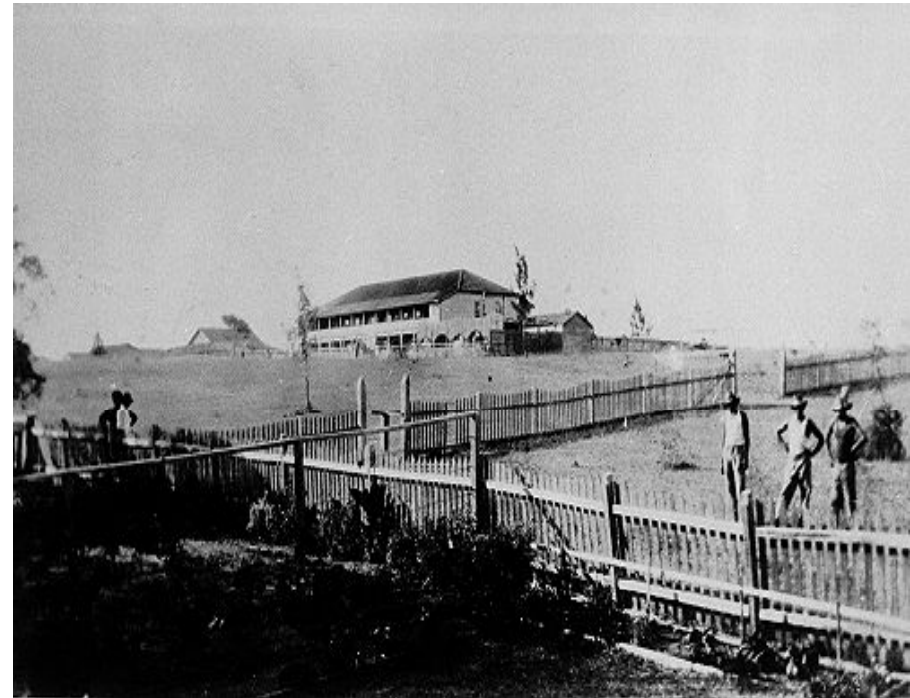
- › Spivak (2010 in Morris) and the literature of the subaltern studies group suggest that the oppressed, 'true' subaltern cannot speak- are voiceless
 - › “If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more in the shadow” (Spivak,2010 in Morris, p 257)
 - › Attempts to speak for the oppressed, alienate the subject and such attempts get caught up in the (re)production of the dominating discourse and further silence the subaltern.
 - › Thus we present the herstories of those who **were** subaltern, who found voice in their narratives.
 - › This is also an attempt for the three of us to attempt to ‘unlearn our privileges’. We are one white Anglo-Australian academic, one Aboriginal Australian and one academic Indian-Australian , who present these voices that were subaltern.
 - › **Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty**. 2010 in Rosalind Morris(ed) *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*. Columbia University Press
-

Ruth Hegarty

Yvonne Butler

Bigali Hanlon

- Born in Mitchell in a 'yumba'.
- Cherbourg mission as ward of state at four.
- Domestic service apprentice at fourteen.
- Twelve hour days, 2 shillings and 6 pence a week pocket money and same in a trust account (which she never received).
- Two daughters taken from her – Ruthie back to work and the father banished to Palm Island.
- 1951 marries Joe Hegarty moves back to the reserve and has five more children.



- Grew up on Mt Garnet aboriginal reserve with parents who were apprenticed workers – father worked away and mother long hours.
- From 8-10 in hospital diagnosed with malnutrition.
- Leaves school at 14 to work on cattle station.
- Then as a governess on Wairuna Station – apart from pocket money most of her wage placed in a provident fund that she was never given access to.
- First 18 years of her marriage placed under the Aboriginal Protection Act.

- Born 1940 Mulga Downs near Wittenoom
 - Removed from mother in 1946 at the age of 6 to Sr. Kate's (Queens Park school) home in Perth.
 - 13 or 14 sent to Babakin near Bruce Rock to domestic service.
 - At 16 went off to Royal Perth to train as a nurse's aide and then to Broome to work as a nurse.
 - Went back to Perth met and married Roger.
 - Was told her family were dead, but memories and her persistent search lead her to go north until she found her family in Wittenoom.
 - Lives in Roebourne – has 3 children and six grandchildren
 - Bigali Hanlon is a respected elder of the Yindjibarndi community
-

Stolen Names and Stolen identity

- › “Eeight” became Egypt, her daughter first named ‘Sudan’ became ‘Susan’ (by authorities). On entering homes, they were ‘rebaptised’ with new surnames.
- › Not allowed to know where they were born *“They go, no, we’re not allowed to tell you where you come from. Your mother and father are dead. I said, I remember..I could smell that sheep smell. It was so intense, you know..”*

Family told not to speak to them or seek to see them

So I go back to Wittenoom, I went up to this black fella and unbeknown to me one was my cousin brother and one was my brother Alec and brother Guinness. I went up to them and I said ‘excuse me, do you know my mother? They said ‘yes’ I said ‘do you know who I am?’ ‘They go ‘yes’. Where’s my mother? She comes to town every Saturday to see you, well why doesn’t she talk to me? We’ve been told we’re not allowed to go anywhere near you by the boss”

- › “The child is taken away from the mother and sometimes never sees her again. Thus these children grow up as whites knowing nothing of their own environment. At the expiration of the period of 2 years the mother goes into service, so it doesn’t really matter if she has a dozen children” (Choo, 2001, 50).
- › *‘I’d come home from work pregnant and so gone the way of most other girls from the dormitory. I was painfully aware that our lives were beginning to mirror those of our mothers . We were still dormitory girls and so were our babies, and it looked like it was continuing on through our children. The enormous irony for me was that, instead of ever reaching a point in life where I could escape from this system, the cycle had begun again.’* (Ruth Hegarty).
- › “90% of the girls sent out to work as domestics returned pregnant to white men” (Archbishop Donaldson in 1915 cited in Ross Kidd 1994, 273).

- › 1 suitcase
- › 1 cake of soap
- › 1 towel
- › 1 nightdress
- › 1 dressing gown
- › 1 pair of shoes
- › 1 pair of slippers
- › 1 pair of stockings
- › 1 suspender belt
- › 1 hat
- › 2 panties
- › 2 housedresses
- › 1 good dress
- › 1 cardigan
- › 1 comb
- › New issue of sanitary napkins and belt
- › Toothpaste and brush

- › It was standard, every girl who went out to work was given this order of clothes from the mission store, it was not a free issue we had to payback the cost from our very low wage. I wanted them to see my new things and to be excited for me, Everything new was laid out on the bed for the kids to see, they were as excited as I was about the new things, all store bought, things we rarely ever got.
- › Ruth Hegarty “*Is that you Ruthie?*”

ONLY IDENTITY LEFT IS THAT OF WORKER

Women and Hard Work

- › *It was a slave labour system. We worked very long hours for next to nothing..I remember everything that happened: How humiliating it was to go as a child to go tot he police station to watch your Mum and Dad being interrogated for their own money (Yvonne Butler 2006 interview).*
- › *First at 5.30,I was shown how to make the fire in the woodstove, Second I was to help with breakfast, set the table, serve the food, next I was told to empty the potties from under each bed, Then I was to make morning tea and arrange the trays before I was allowed to take my own morning tea. On and on it went till 3pm. Then there was a hour's break, then afternoon tea, prepare dinner, wash up. I could not go to bed until all the fire and heat had gone out of the wood fire; I had to set it for the following morning with kindling, wood and paper, every day this routine went on without a break (Ruth Hegarty 'Is that you Ruthie?').*
- › *We had to polish the floors on our hands and knees and we had to polish them so we could see our pants and our face. (Bigali Hanlon).*

- › From 1890 to 1985 many Aborigines denied wages controlled by Federal and State Governments.
- › 2006 Senate announced an inquiry into Aboriginal stolen wages. Since then: ...
- › **Western Australia:** 62 meetings in 58 towns and communities. Received over 500 submissions. Report currently with Minister.
- › **Queensland:** Indigenous Wages and Savings Repatriation Scheme with a pool of \$55.4 million (payments of \$2,000 to \$4,000) plus \$40 million paid in award wages.
- › 2007 nearly \$20 million paid to over 5,500 people.
- › Claims period closed April 2009.
- › **Victoria, South Australia, NT and Tasmania:** No schemes

New South Wales

- › Aboriginal Trust Fund Repayment Scheme established in 2005. Closing date for applications 31 May 2009. Capped Payments of \$11,000. Payments before the cap ranged \$1000 -\$44,129.
- › As at 12 September 2011 **\$8,396,711** has been approved for repayment.
- › Processing continues and payments are being made out to direct claimants (**45% of funds disbursed to date**), spouses, or direct descendents (only if registered before the 2009 deadline).
- › Some 6.85% of the claims(618) are yet to be assessed.
- › **List of Endowee Balances** documenting those who had trustee accounts was compiled in 1938. However, this list has not been widely publicized and being named on this list has not been deemed evidence in itself of a legitimate claim.
- › **Source: Public Interest Advocacy Centre**

- › Their identity as women, mothers, daughters or wives were negated.
- › The only sense of identity left to them is that of worker.
- › Their identity as economic actors was negated.
- › Stolen Wages represent more than denial of money and the need for recompense, they are symbolic of stolen identity.

What do you hope for your grandchildren?

Well I just don't hope anything really for them because they have to do what they have to do, but, I think my grandchildren now who they are. They have their own identity. They haven't any problem with their identity. So you know, I just think that they know who they are, which is really important to have their own identity.

Bigali Hanlon.

- Ezzy, D. (1998) 'Theorising Narrative Identity', *The Sociological Quarterly*, 39 (2), 239–252.
- Featherstone, L. (2006) "Imagining the Black Body: Race, Gender and Gynaecology in Late Colonial Australia", *Lilith*, 15, pp. 86-96.
- Goodall, H. (1995) "Assimilation Begins in the Home": the State and Aboriginal Women's Work as Mothers in New South Wales, 1900s to 1960s", *Labour History*, 69, pp. 75-102.
- Haskins, V. (2001). On the doorstep: Aboriginal domestic service as a Contact Zone. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 16(34),13–25.
- Haskins, V. (2005) "'& so we are "Slave owners"!": Employers and the NSW Aborigines Protection Board Trust Funds," *Labour History*
- Hegarty, R. (2003) *Is that You Ruthie?*, Queensland University Press, St Lucia.
- Higman, B. (2002). *Domestic service in Australia*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press.
- Huggins, J. (1985). White aprons, black hands: Aboriginal women domestic servants in Queensland, *Labour History*, 69,188–195
- Hodder, Ian (2000), "The Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture," in: *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage, 13-21.
- Kidd, R. 'Aboriginal Protection in Queensland', Accessed at <http://www.linksdisk.com/roskidd/tpages/t3.htm>, 14 May, 2010.
- Kidd, Rosalind (2002) "Discovering whiteness", *Hecate's Australian Women's Book review*, 14(1).
- Kidd, Rosalind (1994) *Regulating Bodies: Administrations and Aborigines in Queensland, 1840-1988*, Unpublished thesis.
- Lake, M. (1992) "Mission Impossible: How Men Gave Birth to the Australian Nation – Nationalism, Gender and Other Seminal Acts", *Gender and History*, 4(3), pp. 305-322.
- McGrath, Ann. 'Modern Stone Age slavery': images of Aboriginal labour and sexuality [online]. *Labour History*, no.69, Nov 1995: (30)-51.
- Riessman Catherine (2001) *Analysis of personal Narrative*. Handbook of Interviewing, edited by J.F. Gubrium and J.A. Holstein, Sage Publications.

Yvonne Butler:

Australian 2006 'Rough Justice Over Stolen Wages', 14 Oct.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/features/rough-justice-over-stolen-wages/story-e6frg6z6-111112357435> Commonwealth of Australia, 2006.

'Senate Inquiry into Stolen

Wages'http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/completed_inquiries/2004-07/stolen_wages/index.htm

Commonwealth of Australia, 2008 'Parliamentary Debates', Miss Yvonne Butler Speech, 28 Aug
Cairns Post, 2005 'Runaway slave seeks stolen millions', 15 April

<http://lists.perthimc.asn.au/pipermail/blackgreensolidarity/2005-April/000245.html>

Courier Mail, 2005 'Stolen Wage Compo Deal: An Insult', 28 March Interview with Damien Carrick, 2006 'Law Report', ABC Radio National, 24 Oct

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/lawreport/stories/2006/1768962.htm>

Interview with Steve Austin, 2005 'Conversation Hour', ABC radio Qld. 18 March

<http://www.abc.net.au/queensland/stories/s1326823.htm>

Stolen Wages Update 6, 2005 'Survey Launched to Fill the Gap', April
Stolen Wages Update 7, 2005 'Research Your Records and talk Stolen Wages Up', July