Representations of Aboriginal women and their sexuality

‘Portrait of Aboriginal women and baby’ by J W Lindt, Grafton C1874.

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School of Social Sciences
Submitted on the 24th of October 2008, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Arts Degree (Honours) in Anthropology.
Dedicated to Brother Paul Smith, who taught me, and so many others, how to dream; and my father, Maxwell Wright, who gave me the will to achieve.
Student Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is the result of my own independent research, except where otherwise acknowledged in the reference list. This material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

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Amy Humphreys

Supervisor’s Certificate of Approval

I certify that I have read the final draft of this thesis and that it is ready for submission in accordance with the Thesis requirements as set out in the School of Social Science Honours (Anthropology/Archaeology) Handbook.

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Dr. Sally Babidge
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Abstract

In historical literature and print media, Aboriginal women have been represented as either victims of (Indigenous or non-Indigenous) male brutality and sexual attention, or as sexually promiscuous. This thesis explores these representations and the extent to which they prevail in contemporary media. Theoretically this thesis draws on Michel Foucault’s (1990a; 1990b; 1990c) discursive analysis framework to investigate representations of Aboriginal women in historical and contemporary discourses and the consequences for Aboriginal women. Thus I presented an analysis of contemporary media representations focused on the sexual violence and exploitation of Aboriginal women and girls, for evidence of the ways in which they reflect colonial discourses. I also carried out a critical evaluation of academic representations of Aboriginal women, to highlight the role some academics have unwittingly played in reinforcing colonial stereotypes. This thesis demonstrates the damaging effect that such representations continue to have on the ability of Aboriginal women and girls to receive justice when raped. This thesis highlights the need for new processes when representing Aboriginal women, particularly the need to use history to move beyond representation to inclusive collaborative processes.
Acknowledgements

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Chapter One: Introduction

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, an indigenous academic, argues that colonial discourses on indigenous women’s sexuality led to the objectification and resultant dehumanisation of indigenous women (1999:39). In colonial Australia, Aboriginal women were labelled “black velvet”; a sexual metaphor that asserted their exoticism to the white male populace (Evans 1975:103; Evans 1982:15; McGrath 1987:8). Simultaneously representations of Aboriginal men as brutish towards their female counterparts were enforced by early settler accounts and ethnographic research (Roth 1984a; 1984b; 1984c; 1984d; Tench 1961: 160, 201, 290-1). These descriptions enshrined the belief that Aboriginal women were available sexually to white men. They also alleviated guilt over such liaisons as ‘her treatment as a concubine being generally speaking far more humane than that which the Aboriginal wife received from her husband’ (Threlkeld 1974:49). In this thesis I assess the implication that these colonial representations and constructions of Aboriginal women’s sexuality persist in contemporary discourses, with negative consequences for Aboriginal women.

The focus on sexuality within colonial discourses is representative of the political and social concerns of settler societies, who needed sexual access to Aboriginal women to stop the widespread development of homosexuality in the colony and to attract workers into rural areas (Broome 2002:137; Evans 1975; McGrath 1987:69; Rees 2002:39; Reynolds 1987:73). In Michel Foucault’s examination of moral discourse he argues that sexuality is constructed by those in power to conform to the political expectations and requirements of sexual behaviour (1990a:26,152). Accordingly, within the Australian context, discourses on Aboriginal women’s sexuality were propagated to promote their sexual availability for colonists who needed their services (McGrath 1984:237; Moreton-Robinson 2002:170; Rees 2002:39). Academic interpretations of sexuality in Aboriginal society unwittingly validated these colonial ideologies which defined Aboriginal women as both promiscuous and vulnerable victims.

In this thesis I argue that (some) Australian media has continually disseminated two common rhetorics on Aboriginal women and their sexuality; as powerless victims or
lascivious prostitutes. The sustained proliferation of such discourses can be seen, for example, in the ABC’s *Lateline* program’s depictions of prostitution in northern New South Wales Aboriginal communities (2008a). These discourses can also be seen in the judicial discourse of the Aurukun rape case, which underlines the possible effects that these representations can have on Aboriginal women and girls (*Lateline* 2008d). This thesis analyses these two case-studies of Aboriginal women and their sexuality to determine if there are correlations with historical discourses.

The ideological preconceptions that have influenced these sexual representations and the effects are addressed by academics Diane Bell (1982) and Tracey Moffatt (1987) from varying perspectives. They both focus on Aboriginal women’s agency in making choices over their sexual conduct and argue that their agency has been disempowered by discourses which have ignored or manipulated Aboriginal voice\(^1\). Indigenous academics, like Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2002), argue that the penetration of victim and promiscuous discourses in media and academia ignores the active agency of Aboriginal women in owning their own future and power. They argue that indigenous women’s life writings document their agency and counter the ‘hegemonic discourse’, particularly academic discourse, and assert their right to speak for themselves and for their shared past (Moreton-Robinson 2002:xxv; Tuhiwai Smith 1999:37).

The Bell/Huggins debate is one example of Aboriginal women expressing their agency and challenging academic discourse. More importantly for this thesis, the debate also highlights the importance of addressing how academic representations of Aboriginal sexuality have been constructed and the possible consequences (see Bell and Nelson 1989; Huggins, Willmot, Tarrago, Willetts, Bond, Holt, Bourke, Bin-Salik, Fowell, Schmider, Craigie and McBride-Levi 1991; and Larbalestier 1990). Specifically the Bell/Huggins debate details the challenge that female Aboriginal academics have made to white researchers, by defining what it is to represent Aboriginal women from a white perspective and the contentious issues that can arise from such representations. In this thesis I take the underlying issues highlighted in the

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\(^1\) More specifically ‘agency by which opinion is addressed’ (*Pocket Oxford Dictionary* 1982:1018)
debate further, by demonstrating the effects that representations, like that critiqued by Huggins (et al 1991), continue to have on Aboriginal women and girls.

Methodology and Method: Representations of Aboriginal women in media

In this thesis, I undertake a discursive analysis of representations of Aboriginal women’s sexuality in media discourses. My discursive analysis is underpinned by Stuart Hall’s framework of discursive representation as:

concerned with the effects and consequences of representation - its politics. It examines not only how language and representation produce meaning, but how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practiced and studied (1997:6).

In my analysis of representations of Aboriginal women’s sexuality, I use Foucault’s ideas regarding ‘discursive constructions of regimes of power’ (1990a:152; 1990b:46) to explore ‘the production of colonial discourses and their effects’ on Aboriginal women (Stoler 1995:1).

Foucault’s demonstration that sexuality is ‘a result and an instrument of power’s designs’, throughout his work The History of Sexuality, provides the underlying framework for my analysis of Australian colonial representations (1990a:152). Principally Foucault’s argument is that those in power dominate representations of sexuality and the experience of sexuality, in order to regulate and control populations (1990a:26, 152; 1990b:4; 1990c). Historian Raymond Evans similarly argued that colonists’ moral discourses on Aboriginal sexuality asserted white men’s moral authority and power (1982:11). Consequently the availability of Aboriginal women for sexual interactions was emphasised, to alleviate any guilt about such liaisons for white men (1982:11). Evans also argues that for Aboriginal women, the racist and sexist ideologies of colonialism entrenched their identity within a subordinate sexual role, and fostered their degradation within the community (Evans 1982:9; Saunders 1991).

By following a Foucauldian discursive approach to examine the interrelationship between politics and sexuality in colonial discursive representations of Aboriginal
women, this thesis highlights their underlying ideologies and preconceptions (Foucault 1990a; 1990b; 1990c). I use Foucault’s discursive approach and analytical framework to examine the construction, proliferation and consequences of these colonial discourses on Aboriginal women in the Australian context, as previously examined by historians Raymond Evans (1975, 1982) and Kay Saunders (1991). Their analysis of colonial discourses about Aboriginal women illuminates the political and moral ideologies of colonial society in Australia and how they defined Aboriginal sexuality (Evans 1982:8; Saunders 1982:158). I use a similar discursive analysis in my examination of contemporary media, to discern any consistencies with historical representations, and the repercussions for Aboriginal women. I then examine how academics and Aboriginal women are deconstructing these historical representations of Aboriginal sexuality contemporarily and the implications for media and academia when they choose to represent Aboriginal social issues.

The majority of the material I examine falls within approximately 20 years before and after the change of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. The turn of the century thus functions as a signpost for my argument that there is a continuum of representations of Aboriginal women from the beginnings of white settlement to the present. By using settler accounts, media reports, ethnographic and academic data to demonstrate this continuum, I also highlight the prevalence of these views throughout these varying media. By analysing them together a greater understanding of how they have all contributed to the current situation can be reached. My use of these varying mediums will also highlight the profundity of Huggins (et al 1991) argument that some academic works and Aboriginal voices can be unintentionally sensationalised and manipulated, to support unsubstantiated constructions of Aboriginal people, their culture and social issues.

**What it is to represent Indigenous Women**

The identity of indigenous people, who ‘still [remember] other ways of being, of knowing and of relating to the world’, is complicated by a lived reality of colonialism and colonial representations (Tuhiwai Smith 2007:348-349). The lived experiences of Aboriginal women in Australia, including experiences of historical racism and sexism, have initiated a re-examination of what it is to represent them academically
and in the media. The Bell/Huggins debate was initiated by Diane Bell’s article “Speaking about rape is everyone’s business”, co-authored by Topsy Napurrula Nelson (1989), which sparked agitation amongst 12 educated Aboriginal women. Spearheaded by Jackie Huggins, the group objected to Nelson’s co-authorship and the article’s claim that ‘rape is “everyone’s business”’ (Huggins et al 1991:506).

Huggins (et al 1991:506) argued that Bell’s decision to discuss rape from her ‘privileged white middle-class perspective’, ignored the history of racism and power relations that Aboriginal women have endured from white women (see also Larbalestier 1990:146). Huggins (et al 1991) also argued that Bell’s ‘assumption that she could speak on behalf of Aboriginal women’, underlined her white privilege and ‘the familiar claim of modern Western professional-scientific authority to speak about and on behalf of others, without their voices being present to arbitrate, complicate and even contest this claim’ (see also Yeatman 1993:239-240). They also argue that while Bell uses her white privilege to present her interpretation of rape, it is the Aboriginal community which will have to bear the brunt of media sensationalism and racial stereotyping (Huggins et al 1991:506).

The issue of authorship was also raised in the Huggins (et al 1991) letter, focused on the claim that Nelson was a co-author of the paper. The article, written in the first person by Bell, locates her as the active voice, with quotes from Nelson interposed within the article; reacting to reports of abuse, speaking about traditional life and how things have changed (Bell and Nelson 1989; Larbalestier 1990:147). According to Huggins (et al), this is evidence that Nelson is a ‘chief informant’ providing evidence for Bell, and not a co-author as asserted in the article (1991:506). Bell’s use of Nelson’s traditional credentials to authorise her interpretations and right to speak is also challenged by Huggins (et al) and others as they assert their entitlement to speak, not just as academics, but as Aboriginal women ‘who have felt the effects of colonisation far worse than our traditional sisters and brothers’ (1991:507).

The Bell/Huggins debate and its importance to my thesis is the emphasis on representation; what it means to represent and be represented by an “other”. Huggins (et al) highlighted the historical and contemporary issues of representation in their letter to the editor, by stating ‘Don’t let white stereotypes continue to reign supreme
about Aboriginals’ (1991:507). They argue that white stereotypes about Aboriginal people continue to dominate, and that Bell’s article has the potential to be ‘abused and misinterpreted by racists in the wider community’ who could use Bell’s interpretation of interracial rape to enforce racial stereotypes, like the “Black rapist” (Bell and Nelson 1989:406; Huggins et al 1991:506). Huggins (et al 1991) reflections of the past in the present also help to define my own deconstruction of representations of Aboriginal women’s sexuality, by highlighting how academic interpretations in particular have been used to authorise inaccurate representations of Aboriginal women with detrimental effects.

In Raymond Evans (1982) article “Don’t you remember Black Alice Sam Holt? Aboriginal women in Queensland History”, he examines the interchange between racism and sexism in representations of Aboriginal women. Evans examines historical representations through the racist, sexist and Christian (of sex as sinful and shameful) ideologies of the colonial period, which led to depictions of ‘Aboriginal women as being dirty, sinful, animalistic, ugly’, and ‘founts of insatiable libidinal desire’ (1982:10-11). Evans argues that though Aboriginal women’s experience of racism and sexism in colonial Queensland is ‘largely denied to us’, the effects can be gleaned from colonial discourses, such as newspapers, parliamentary commentaries and personal correspondence, which describe the treatment that Aboriginal women received from men in the colony (1982:7-9). Evans work is also problematic, as he derives his constructions from a white male perspective, and places these issues in the past, whereas Huggins (et al 1991) and others, including myself, all argue that these stereotypes are not just depictions of a racist historical society, but continue to be very real for Aboriginal women today.

Kay Saunders (1991:159) continues Evans approach, assessing how historical racism and sexism has rendered ‘Black women invisible’ and ‘their identity socialized out of existence’ by historical discourses (Hooks cited in Saunders 1991:158; see also Attwood 1989:138). Saunders asserts that ‘Blacks are invariably seen as male’, and as such are labelled generically in literature, and when academics like Evans do study Aboriginal women, their insights are ignored (1991:159-160). For Saunders, the lack of an Aboriginal perspective, imperial racism, and the continuation of ethnocentric constructions of Australian womanhood, will ultimately undermine an ‘understanding
of the complexity of Australian history’ and continue the marginalisation of Aboriginal women (1991:160).

Ann McGrath’s (1984) examination of sexual liaisons between Aboriginal women and colonists in the Northern Territory in the early 20th Century highlights the complexity, but also the brutality of these sexual liaisons. By interposing anecdotes of Aboriginal women being mistreated with a thorough assessment of community attitudes to sex, McGrath tries to analyse liaisons from an Aboriginal perspective (1984:239, 243, 248). McGrath uses personal communications and academic constructions of sexuality to develop her understanding of sexual liaisons, where women had rights and control over their sexuality (1984:243-244, 246, 248), wWhilst deconstructing those of colonists, that Aboriginal women were disempowered and endemically ‘‘available’ for prostitution’ (1980:237, 243-4; 1987:69).

Historians’ and post-colonial academics’ focus remains on the colonial past, but in this thesis I demonstrate that these colonial remnants are very real for Aboriginal women. Historians’ works have underlined the ideological preconceptions that fostered representations of women and demonstrated the negative consequences for Aboriginal women and their communities. Thus in this thesis I contribute an anthropological perspective that demonstrates the continued relevance of the issues raised by the Bell/Huggins debate and most importantly the effects of these representations. This thesis also seeks to contribute examples of collaborative methods of representation. Such approaches underline the importance of the colonial past in the present, and demonstrate the reality of this past for Aboriginal women.

Historical representations of Aboriginal women’s sexuality obscure how Aboriginal women may have seen or presented themselves in these discourses. The lack of insight or inclination to understand the female “other” has, I argue, remained consistent within media discourses. I argue that Aboriginal women are continually represented within media discourses as passive victims of male oppression, who cannot fend for themselves or make the right decisions to defend their sexuality. I begin by examining historical sources, particularly Hunter’s and Tench’s accounts of Sydney’s first years, Roth’s ethnographic papers of Northern Queensland, and articles from *The Queenslander* and *The Queensland Figaro* Newspapers. I argue that these
colonial representations of Aboriginal women’s sexuality were designed to objectify and dehumanise Aboriginal women and their right to deny sexual access (Tuhiwai Smith 1999:39).

Chapter outline

Chapter Two of my thesis examines some historical sources from Queensland, which represent Aboriginal sexuality and critically discuss the political and social ideologies that constructed these representations. Chapter Three examines representations of Aboriginal women’s sexuality in contemporary media discourses, to assess the implication that they reflect colonial discourses. Chapter Four analyses academic representations of Aboriginal women’s sexuality, sexual relations and the ambiguous legacy of colonialism on Aboriginal women’s agency. Chapter Four also discusses the Bell/Huggins debate and the underlining challenge it poses to academic representations of Aboriginal women. Chapter Five discusses the major conclusions of my thesis to evaluate the profundity of historical sources in affecting how Aboriginal women’s sexuality is represented contemporarily.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have highlighted the aims and methods of this thesis, based on post-colonial theory and a discursive analysis framework. In the following chapter I analyse historical representations of Aboriginal women and their sexuality. These accounts provide a basis from which I can uncover whether colonial discourses and representations of Aboriginal women persist contemporarily, with similar outcomes.
Chapter two: Representations of Aboriginal women in Historical accounts

Watkin Tench (1961) and John Hunter (1968) both sailed out to Australia on the First Fleet, and their accounts of the first 5 years of settlement depicted instances of Aboriginal women being treated ‘with savage barbarity’ by Aboriginal men (1961:290). Tench recounts the beatings and wounds inflicted on ‘Eora’ women by their male counterparts, describing Baneelon (Bennelong) as laughingly recounting his abduction of a girl from another ‘tribe’, who he beat ‘till she was insensible, and covered with blood’ (1961:160, 201, 290-1). In Hunter’s (1968:339) recollections, love making was ‘always prefaced with a beating, which the female seems to receive as a matter of course’, and according to Tench (1961:290) ‘nothing is more common’ than unsuccessful suitors ravishing the women they desire. Historian Richard Broome however argues that the scars on the bodies of these women, used as evidence of Aboriginal male brutality, were not inflicted by cruel husbands, but the ‘self-inflicted wounds of grief’ (2002:24, 27).

The possible misunderstanding over the afore-mentioned wounds is one example of how colonial accounts of Aboriginal customs might not always portray an appropriate representation of Aboriginal society. Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that:

> From some indigenous perspectives the gathering of information by scientists was as random, ad hoc and damaging as that undertaken by amateurs. There was no difference, from these perspectives, between ‘real’ or scientific research and any other visits by inquisitive and acquisitive strangers (1999:2-3).

In the Australian context some accounts by amateurs and academics alike represented Aboriginal women as ‘slaves’ to their male ‘masters’, who were continually featured in colonial accounts as beating their women (Kaberry 2004:9; Tench 1961:160, 201, 290-1; Hunter 1968: 339). For Aboriginal women in Australia it is these accounts which established a pattern of gender relations, in which Aboriginal women bore the brunt of male aggression both metaphorically and physically.
'no more than “domesticated cows”'

According to Phyllis Kaberry, a female anthropologist of the 1930s, there existed a view within anthropology that Aboriginal women ‘were no more than “domesticated cows”’ (Kaberry 2004:9). Historians argue that these representations, coupled with those which propagated assertions of their promiscuity and ill-treatment by male members of their communities, demoralised and devalued Aboriginal women’s traditional status (Evans 1982:7-8). However, works like Kaberry’s refuted these prevailing views and constructions of Aboriginal women as ‘a slave’ to her Aboriginal husband (2004:9). Kaberry argued that the economic contributions of Aboriginal women made ‘her an indispensable unit in the tribal economy: an invaluable asset as a wife’ (2004:271). Specifically Kaberry sheds light on an area of research that is underrepresented in the colonial literature, Aboriginal women. It is the works of Kaberry and other forward thinking colonial anthropologists that give voice to Aboriginal women, and their constructions of traditional Aboriginal culture, especially their status. On the other hand works like Walter Roth’s *The Queensland Aborigines*, inadvertently supported the colonial construction that Aboriginal women were second class citizens within their own culture, through his representations of gender relations in north Queensland communities (1984a; 1984b; 1984c; 1984d). This is especially the case of his illustrations of female initiation (Roth 1984a:174; 1984b:11).

Roth’s graphic descriptions of the male role in female initiation ceremonies and ‘promiscuous coition’ reinforced colonial constructions of gender and sexual relations in Aboriginal communities; that Aboriginal women bore the brunt of male brutality (1984a:174-5; 1984b:11). Roth’s interpretation of marriage laws, which depicted a scenario where men had control over women’s sexuality, also underpinned colonial chauvinistic ideologies that defined Aboriginal women as chattels (1984c:6). Roth’s, Hunter’s and Tench’s accounts, along with others, depicted Aboriginal women as victims of a brutal society, which inadvertently bolstered colonial ideologies on Aboriginal gender relations and defined the place of Aboriginal women in colonial society as such.
Colonial discourses, such as those in a debate in *The Queenslander* in 1880, focused on the actions of the Native Police Force and their ‘dispersals’, reflect the discourse of victimisation in their accounts of Aboriginal women’s treatment by men in the colony, especially their own. Accounts of Native Police selling and sexually assaulting Aboriginal women were readily invoked by settlers who expressed sympathy for the Aboriginal communities disintegrating around them (‘North East Coast’ 1880; *The Queenslander* 5th June 1880). By authorizing their ideological constructions of gender relations in Aboriginal society, through academic and early contact accounts, colonists validated their behaviour towards Aboriginal women as culturally appropriate, as it was what they were accustomed to (Evans 1975:106; Frances 2007:101). Tuhiwai-Smith’s (1999:2-3) argument that amateur and scientific perspectives of indigenous people were damaging can be seen in these accounts that supported the sexual objectification of Aboriginal women in Australia. Though Roth’s accounts of gender relations in Aboriginal societies involuntarily helped to foster these ideologies, Kaberry argued that Anthropology, more generally, has fostered a ‘sound scepticism’ of ‘the attitudes that tend to regard her [Aboriginal woman] as a chattel, a harried prostitute’, in colonial discourses (2004:9).

Discourses on the brutality of Aboriginal societies allowed colonists to believe that Aboriginal women would be willing to enter into sexual arrangements with them as their treatment of Aboriginal women was generally more ‘humane’ (Threlkeld 1974:49). A deficiency of settler women in colonial society meant that sex was a valuable and important commodity. In consequence, colonist’s accounts that depicted sexual activity in Aboriginal communities were used to assert preconceived European ideologies, which defined Aboriginal women as sexually promiscuous and inherently available (Evans 1975:69; 1982:11; Roth 1984a:174; 1984d:22; Said 1985).

Aboriginal people’s understanding of their sexual activity pre-contact and throughout the colonialist era cannot be discerned; however colonial constructions of their sexual customs (see *The Queenslander* 19th June 1880), have been continually accepted by many in the academic sphere (see Blainey 1976:29; Broome 2002:124; Evans 1975:69; Frances 1994:2; Frances 2007:78, 80; Hamilton 1975:168; McGrath 1980:249; 1984:243; and Perkins 1991:68). Some academics, like Broome, argue that some sexual practices in Aboriginal communities were important for the
establishment of ‘kinship and reciprocal ties’, which traditionally brought strangers into their communities (2002:59). Raelene Frances argues that some Aboriginal communities tried to use these same traditional sexual customs to establish ties with colonists (1994:5-6).

The promiscuous and vulnerable victim in colonial discourse

Colonists subsumed their understanding of Aboriginal sexual traditions into their own cultural context as prostitution, which devalued the status of Aboriginal women within colonist society (Perkins 1991:1). Roth argues that Aboriginal peoples viewed prostitution as immoral and degrading, the women are despised ‘and the man who habitually consorts with such a woman is similarly regarded with contempt’ (1984c:7). Similarly colonists who engaged in prolonged personal and sexual relationships with Aboriginal women were called a ‘gin-jockey’ or ‘combo’ and were rejected by white society as morally degraded individuals, as they too were habitually consorting with prostitutes according to the colonial discourse (McGrath 1980:253; 1987:70). Which makes Roth’s interpretation of the status of prostitutes in Aboriginal society problematic, as it reflects colonial views which may have already permeated these communities, and impacted on the status of Aboriginal women and how their sexual activity was constructed. However, by defining their sexual liaisons with Aboriginal women as prostitution, most colonists established a precedent to sexual interactions with them that allowed them to access Aboriginal women without any ongoing responsibility (McGrath 1984:237; Perkins 1991:1).

Sexual access to women was of paramount importance for bush stations that needed employees, and Aboriginal women were an attraction for those claiming to be “sexplorers” who enjoyed “black velvet”, ‘which was very fashionable in Queensland’ (Broome 2002:137; McGrath 1980:251; 1987:69; The Queensland Figaro 17th March 1883; Reynolds 1987:73). In one ‘Commonplace Bush Narrative’ a manager employed two Aboriginal boys on the proviso that he supplied them with a ‘gin’ as companion (The Queensland Figaro 12 September 1885). Ann McGrath argues that colonial representations of Aboriginal women as ‘sex symbols, as ‘studs’

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2 The term ‘gin’ in colonial discourse was jargon for Aboriginal woman.
or ‘black velvet’, enforced a stereotype which ‘implied that all Aboriginal women were ‘available’ for prostitution’ under any circumstances (1987:69). Broome argues that for Aboriginal women, their dispossessed condition meant they were often forced to accept this position in the social hierarchy, forced to prostitute to survive (2002:101).

These colonial discourses on Aboriginal women combine to assert a complex account of social relations between the broader colonial community and the Aboriginal women who were forced into their midst after the appropriation of their traditional lands (Broome 2002:101). Susan Hunt argues that:

For some Aboriginal women, particularly those living in European towns, the exchange of sex for basic commodities was essential. In some cases, it was said that Aboriginal women supported the remnants of their tribe through prostitution, perhaps at the encouragement of tribal elders (1986:111).

Obliged to participate in the white economy Aboriginal women also worked as domestic servants, stock workers, pearl divers and even in the mining industry, where ‘satisfying the sexual demands of their co-workers and bosses was usually considered part of the job’ (Frances 1994:5). By entrenching the sexualisation of Aboriginal women’s identity, colonial society could enforce their sexist ideologies and representations of them as prostitutes, which sometimes led to their degradation and humiliation, especially in the form of rape.

In December 1825 Lancelot Threlkeld, a missionary, wrote in memoranda that he had ‘heard at night the shrieks of [Aboriginal] Girls, about 8 or 9 years of age, taken by force by the vile men of Newcastle’ (1974:91). He also writes of witnessing an Englishman beating an Aboriginal man for ‘insulting him’, the insult, Threlkeld states, was that this man would not let the Englishman take away his 10 year old daughter (1974:91). In the *Queensland Figaro* in 1883 one contributor remarked that he:

could, if necessary, tell of, and produce people who know of, hundreds of instances where white savages have raped young maiden [sic] and older gins — ay, and boasted of their deeds vain-gloriously (14 April 1883).
Though asserted in these accounts, rape is not witnessed. Nonetheless it is still used to highlight sexual exploitation, and more significantly the low status of Aboriginal women in colonist society, with some according to Evans describing the rape of Aboriginal women as ‘gin busting’ (1982:15). Aboriginal women’s sexuality was defined by their sexual interactions with colonists, whose access to the wider colonial discourse enabled them to construct and enforce their representation of sexual liaisons with Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women however, had no such chance to represent themselves. For Aboriginal women, their sexuality was degraded and debated within a colonial Christian discourse that claimed perversion whilst enjoying the benefits of their dispossession and resultant poverty (Evans 1982:7-12).

The proliferation of colonial discourses that asserted Aboriginal women’s sexual promiscuity helped to propagate the belief that ‘[t]heir morals and sexual behaviour were ... so low that it was impossible for them to be raped’ (Harris 1982:25). In *The Queenslander* in 1880 one correspondent, ‘North Gregory’ reflected on statements previously made in ‘The Way We Civilise’ feature series, on ‘the ravishing of the gins’ by replying:

> Now I have had considerable experience amongst outside blacks, and I have never heard of a single instance of this crime, and I believe that no inducement for the committal of such a crime exists (12\textsuperscript{th} June 1880).

‘North Gregory’s’ representation of Aboriginal women’s sexuality was reflected in the political sphere by A. H. Palmer in 1884. When replying to a statement on the rape of an Aboriginal woman, he said:

> as to ravishing the woman, anyone who knew anything about the habits of the blacks knew that the blacks had no idea of chastity — that a fig of tobacco would purchase any woman (Queensland Parliamentary Debates (QPD) 1884:107-108).

The cost of their sexual services was thus perceived to be so low that there was no way it would need to be taken by force. Thus an Aboriginal woman could not be raped (Stoler 1989:641). Palmer’s statement went unchallenged by the political elite, thus ensuring that colonists’ behaviour was socially and morally valid, underpinning their use of the land’s previous female inhabitants with impunity (McGrath 1984:237; 1987:69).
Some members of settler society reflected bitterly on constructions of Aboriginal women’s sexuality like those of ‘North Gregory’ and Palmer, by portraying a victimised and oppressed reality for Aboriginal women (see ‘Never Never’ 29th May 1880; ‘North East Coast’ 2nd October 1880; and O’Connor 18th December 1880). Archibald Meston, the Southern Aboriginal Protector, claimed in 1897 that ‘Aboriginal women are usually at the mercy of anybody, from the proprietor or manager to the stockman, cook, rouseabout and jackeroo’ (cited in Evans 1975:103). ‘Never Never’, a correspondent in the Queenslander, claimed that some settlers only allowed Aboriginal communities to stay on their cattle runs, just ‘for the sake of picking out the best looking gins in the tribe’ (29th May 1880).

On the 21st July 1900, the Worker newspaper alleged that Ardock Station in Queensland ‘had eight or nine black gins fenced in with rabbit-proof netting adjoining the house’ (cited in Evans 1975:107). According to Evans, these conditions were corroborated in the ‘Southern Aboriginal Protector, Archibald Meston’s’ July 27th report (1975:107). Another correspondent to The Queenslander, ‘North-East coast’, related a story about an Aboriginal wife and mother who was ‘gang raped’ twice, by members of the Native Police Force, for trying to follow her husband when he left the station they were working on; first for trying to flee, then tracked down and ‘handed over again to the rage and lust of her captors’ (2 October 1880). Stanthorpe O’Connor, a retired sub-inspector of police, recounted a story in The Queenslander narrated to him by a ‘mob’ residing on the Laura (Kennedy) river, of how ‘a white man had sneaked upon a blackfellow and his gin, had shot the blackfellow and taken his gin with him to where he camped, he and his four companions ill-using the gin before she was let free’ (18th December 1880).

Accounts such as these gave voice to humanitarian allegations that Aboriginal women were ‘the ‘victims’ of men’s low morality’, without control or choice over ‘their sexual partners or their lives’ (Hunt 1986:116). These victim rhetorics reflected a social view that Aboriginal people were unable to make the ‘right’ moral decisions since they were childlike in nature, which helped to enforce paternalistic government policies, like the Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act of 1897 (Evans 1975:118; Hunt 1986:109, 116; McGrath 1980:246). Likewise Hamilton
argues that colonial discourses on male brutality in traditional Aboriginal culture were used to enforce paternalistic policies and:

was one of the main humanitarian arguments on which missionaries and others based their claims for smashing Aboriginal culture. The men were violent brutes, the women abject pawns in games of male political power (1975:167).

Evans argues that discourses on Aboriginal male brutality also alleviated guilt for colonists who ‘conveniently believed that native women were merely subject to capture and brutal oppression by their own menfolk, [so] they did not see very much wrong in behaving similarly’ (1975:106). Rhetorics on the victimisation of Aboriginal women became increasingly important for paternalistic government policies, which used this rhetoric to argue for the ‘protection’ and control of Aboriginal people; Aboriginal women in particular (Hunt 1986:109, 116; McGrath 1980:246; 1987:83).

The ability of governments to legislate policies that directly influenced the way Aboriginal people lived was directly related to the concept of the “other” in the colonial context, which dealt more specifically with the concept of the ‘oriental other’, to differentiate between the imperial self and colonised subject (Stoler 1989:646; 1995:204). Edward Said argues that representations of ‘the Orient... rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous orient’, and that many of the generalisations about the orient ‘were handed down through the renaissance’ (1985:22). Said’s analysis of colonial ideologies, which has been widely used in post-colonial studies, is applicable to Australia, where Aboriginal women were defined by colonial constructions of their sexuality and the need for “oriental sex” (1985:190: Stoler 1995:1, 174-5). The ‘exotic sensuousness’ of Aboriginal women was defined by these generalised accounts, and the effect was a prostitution rhetoric that redefined rape by race and Aboriginal women as intrinsically available for sex (Said 1985:72).

Phillipa Levine argues that by defining women’s sexuality by race they could be rendered ‘opaque, readable and of course powerless’ (2003:203). Levine also argues that ‘[p]rostitution was of huge importance to the maintenance of colonial order’, which was ‘a pragmatic if flawed solution serving the dictates of male desire’ (2003:193, 204). Driven by the fear of homosexuality developing in the colonies,
access to women was of fundamental importance to the institutions of colonial society, and was a political driver for the prostitution rhetoric of the period (Evans 1975:103; Rees 2002:39).

For Aboriginal women in Australia declarations by policeman and parliamentarians, that ‘gins are simply prostitutes’, and ‘that a fig of tobacco could purchase’ any Aboriginal woman, enforced colonial ideological constructions of their sexuality, and defined their identity to the populace (Harris 1982:25: Palmer 1884:108). Ann McGrath argues that discourses which stereotyped Aboriginal woman as ‘available for prostitution’ also helped white men ‘assuage themselves of possible guilt for rape, disease, or the children they left in their wake’ (1987:69). In consequence it was believed that Aboriginal women could not be raped, thus denying their rights to justice.

**Conclusion**

In a convict society with few women, Aboriginal women were forced to assume a sexually participatory role. Historical discourses on Aboriginal women’s sexuality were wound up in a context of racism and sexism, where the objectification of indigenous sexuality was used to assert white privilege and power, with a ‘destructive effect on indigenous gender relations’ (Saunders 1991:158; Tuhiwai Smith 1999:39, 151). By deconstructing the functions of Aboriginal women and placing them in a disempowered and sexual role, the political dehumanisation of Aboriginal women was achieved to assuage guilt over colonist’s behaviour and policies towards those they represented (McGrath 1984:237). However, the voices of Aboriginal women are not heard or represented in the colonial moral discourse which objectified and constructed them. In the next chapter I assess the implication that colonial discourses of the victimised, vulnerable and promiscuous Aboriginal woman prevail in contemporary media, with similar consequences.
Chapter Three: Contemporary media representations of Aboriginal women

The crisis in Aboriginal society is a public spectacle, played out in a vast reality show through the media, parliaments, public service and the Aboriginal world. This obscene and pornographic spectacle shifts attention away from everyday lived crisis that many Aboriginal people endure: or do not, dying as they do at excessive rates. This spectacle is not a new phenomenon in Australian public life (Marcia Langton 2008a).

Langton’s argument, that this ‘is not a new phenomenon in Australian public life’, underlines my argument in this chapter; that though there have been many changes to the dynamic of Australian society in the last century, the Australian media has continually represented Aboriginal women as vulnerable, disempowered and promiscuous. These media representations underscore my main objective in this thesis, to demonstrate the continuation of colonial ideologies in contemporary discourses, and highlight the consequences for Aboriginal women.

The ‘public spectacle’ of Aboriginal sexuality in contemporary media focuses on reports of the victimisation of Aboriginal girls in the form of sexual exploitation or rape. These reports support paternalistic ideologies, with intervention strategies like those in the Northern Territory being extolled as a solution to problems in Aboriginal communities. The media’s particular focus on sex in Aboriginal society is analysed in this chapter to see if media representations of Aboriginal women and their sexuality contain similarities to those previously examined. The use of Aboriginal voice in the media reports is also examined, to perceive how media constructs or deconstructs Aboriginal perspectives on Indigenous social issues. These analyses help me to perceive how contemporary media represents Aboriginal women and their sexuality.

‘The outback truckies who trade in child sex, drugs – our special report’

In March 2008, the ABC program Lateline alleged that there was an ‘outback trade between Indigenous girls and truck drivers offering money and drugs for sex in dimly lit truck stops’ (2008a). Lateline (2008a) focused on claims by members of the Moree and Boggabilla communities, that truck drivers were targeting Aboriginal girls for sex, paying them with cash and drugs, and actively seeking girls ‘under the legal age’ (ABC News 2008a). Their graphic portrayal of young girls under the legal age limit
being actively sought for sex by truck drivers, highlights their vulnerability but also the social breakdown occurring when young girls, allegedly ‘as young as eight years old’, are accessible for sexual exploitation (Lateline 2008a).

The truck drivers alleged to be a part of this “sex trade” are portrayed not only as drug dealers and paedophiles, but also as trying to make the older girls, according to “Aboriginal girl four” the main informant in the report, complicit in acting as a pimp when asking them to ‘get a young girl ... 14, 15, nothing over 16’ (Lateline 2008a). “Aboriginal girl four” claims that ‘heaps’ of truckies ‘say like they’re looking for 16 years and under’ and that older girls, including herself, are asked to source younger girls in exchange for money (Lateline 2008a). John Stewart, the journalist who presented the initial report, also claimed that ‘truckies sometimes spike alcoholic drinks to avoid having to pay for sex’, with the girls waking up in cities along the east coast with bruises, and no recollection of what had occurred (Lateline 2008a).

The girls are represented as victims, with “Aboriginal girl one”, after allegedly experiencing the “sex trade” first hand in Moree for six years stating that, ‘It’s not a thing that you want to do and it’s just hurtful and it’s painful and it’s heart aching and in the end it doesn’t get you anywhere’ (Lateline 2008a). “Aboriginal girl one’s” statement that ‘it’s not a thing you want to do’, represents the alleged “sex trade” as unwanted and damaging, by the very girl who has allegedly engaged in it for 6 years (Lateline 2008a). The report paints a striking picture of events, where truck drivers are alleged to have committed criminal acts, and vulnerable Aboriginal girls are depicted as propelled into this situation enduring ‘frightening experiences with truck drivers’ and putting their personal safety at risk (Lateline 2008a).

Marcia Ella Duncan, ‘former chair of the New South Wales Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce’, stated in an interview, directly following Stewart’s initial report, with Tony Jones (Lateline Host), that she ‘first became aware of child prostitution and truck drivers in Moree approximately 15 years ago’ (Lateline 2008b). Duncan’s

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3 In this report there are four unidentified informants. Their faces and names are restricted for privacy and legal reasons. They are labeled as “Aboriginal girl one” or “two” in the transcript, for clarity I identify them in the sequence in which they entered the initial report. It is also important to note that only three of the girls are engaging in the “sex trade”, with “Aboriginal girl three” reporting on the alleged behaviour of friends.
previous position and recognition of the problem, validates Lateline’s claims and highlights the continued impotence of government departments in dealing with allegations like this. Duncan’s (Lateline 2008b) insightful deconstructions of the issue of Aboriginal child sexual abuse and the historical impact on the breakdown of the family unit are important in providing Lateline with an authoritative perspective to substantiate their claims and representations of the “sex trade” and those engaging in it.

Judy Knox is presented as a ‘PhD student and Boggabilla resident’ to authorize her commentary that Aboriginal girls are not deliberately seeking sex, but are forced into the situation through hunger, with truckies ‘cashing in on that dysfunction’ (Lateline 2008a; 2008c). Knox’s representation of the “sex trade” in these communities reflects Hunt and Broome’s historical analysis of liaisons, that Aboriginal women were sometimes forced into prostitution to survive (Broome 2002:101; Hunt 1986:111; Lateline 2008a). Knox’s commentary also reflects the colonial humanist discourse, which alleged that Aboriginal women had no control or choice over ‘their sexual partners or their lives’ (Hunt 1986:116). However, “Aboriginal girl two”, presents a different perspective in her interview with John Stewart (journalist):

JS: Aboriginal women and girls say the sex trade with truck drivers is driven by a need for cash and drugs. Is it more about getting cash, or is it more about just getting drugs?
“AG2”: It’s the drugs, ‘cause you need money to get drugs.
JS: And what sort of drugs?
“AG2”: Speed, ice, ice messed a lot of people up in Moree (Lateline 2008a).

Stewart also alleges that truckies also bring ‘amphetamines’ and ‘marijuana’ to exchange with the girls for their sexual services (2008a).

Dick Estens, winner of the 2004 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s Human Rights Medal for his work in the development of the Aboriginal Employment strategy, states that ‘In all these rural towns where you’ve got large Aboriginal populations, drugs are fairly rife through all the communities’ (ABC News 2008b). Estens stated that ‘I imagine prostitution for drugs generally, not even counting the trucking side of it’ (ABC News 2008b). Though Estens had lived in the Moree community for 30 years and worked closely with local Aboriginals, he was unaware
of the allegations in Moree until the report aired (ABC News 2008b). However, Esten’s ‘imagine[d] prostitution for drugs’ was validated by the media, who used his position in the community to support his claim, though he had no evidence to substantiate it (ABC News 2008a). ABC News’ presentation of Esten’s commentary on drug use characterises how media uses informants, especially those perceived to be expert’s in the community, to validate their representations of Aboriginal women’s sexuality.

The media also used other perceived experts to validate and evaluate why the “sex trade” had continued, with Stephen Bradshaw of the New South Wales Police quoted in a report stating that they ‘have significant information in relation to it’, meaning the “sex trade” (Lateline 2008c). However the ‘under-reporting’ and ‘reluctance of victims and witnesses’ to provide the police with information had led to a lack of convictions (Lateline 2008c). Kevin Humphreys, Federal member for Barwon, states that in Moree police have acted on information but they cannot follow through with arrests if people are not prepared to provide evidence (Lateline 2008a). Community members are thus represented by white males in positions of political and community power in the media discourse, as unwilling to stop the “sex trade”, by supporting the police and are thus positioned as facilitating its continuation. In contrast, male police and politicians are represented in the same media discourse as proactively trying to staunch the “sex trade” in Aboriginal communities, with alleged results (ABC News 2008d; Lateline 2008a).

Judy Knox, presents a different view of police interactions with Aboriginal people in Bogabilla, by alleging that “[t]here were a couple of local constables that were known to be having relations with up to 25 different women in the community ... so yeah, they were abusing their power in that sense” (Lateline 2008a). Knox alleges that women in these relationships would threaten not to turn up to court proceedings, and would threaten the police officers involved that they would tell the Judge about their relationships, forcing the police officers to ‘just drop it’, meaning their cases (Lateline 2008a). Knox thus represents promiscuous Aboriginal women as using their sexual liaisons with officers as blackmail; presenting Aboriginal women’s relationships with police as inherently deviant. Knox’s allegations also reflect an aspect of colonial discourse, which claimed that white men, or ‘combo’s’ as they were sometimes
termed, who maintained sexual relationships with Aboriginal women became morally degraded and a ‘social degenerate’ (see McGrath 1987:70). In this case police officers were morally degraded in their work place through these relations which impinged on their ability to uphold justice. Police representatives responded to these allegations by stating that there was no evidence that police relationships with members of the community had ‘compromised their ability to do their duty’ (Lateline 2008a). Knox’s statement about police sexual liaisons follows “Aboriginal girl four’s” allegation that some truckies do not want girls ‘over 16’, suggesting that sexual liaisons between Aboriginal women and white men inherently contain an element of deviance (Lateline 2008a).

The comments about police officers’ sexual relationships highlight the media focus on Aboriginal women’s sexuality and sexual liaisons. Because police officers are engaging in relationships with Aboriginal women in their community, their behaviour is seen as worthy of inclusion in a report about a “sex trade” targeting underage girls, though, according to the report, none of the Aboriginal women engaging in sexual relationships with police officers were under the age of 17 (Lateline 2008a). Thus the media’s representation of Aboriginal women’s sexual activity with police officers reflects a subtext that these are deviant and reflect the truckies’ exploitation of young Aboriginal girls. These representations hold significant value to my proposition that media representations of Aboriginal women have consistently focused on objectifying their sexuality and sexual liaisons as promiscuous, victimised and in this scenario, morally deviant.

Likewise Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s arguments on deviance and the sexualisation of Aboriginal women highlight how the media focus on sex reflects historical representations of the ‘black female body... as an icon of sexual deviance’ (2002:25, 169). In this Lateline (2008a) report Aboriginal women are continually represented as sexually deviant, be that in exploiting police officers to mitigate their legal responsibilities or engaging in prostitution with truckies. Their deviant sexual encounters give them access to drugs, money through prostitution or escaping their legal liabilities through blackmail. Thus their stories of exploitation are undermined through the representation of them as gaining from these encounters.
The ‘public spectacle’ that was the media and political fall-out from the initial report (see ABC News 2008a; 2008b) supports Langton’s (2008a) argument that the ‘obscene and pornographic spectacle’ of Aboriginal communities in crisis shifts attention away from their lived reality and into sensationalism. One example is Stewart’s allegation that:

community leaders say it’s not just truck drivers... They say that seasonal workers who come into town to do cotton chipping are also targeting young Aboriginal women and sometimes, small children (Lateline 2008c).

Stewart’s allegations are never substantiated by ‘community leaders’ or any member of the community, whose only statement on cotton chipping was to say ‘its been found that people actually target the communities around here where there’s a cotton chipping set-up’ (Lateline 2008c). Clearly cotton pickers will target towns where they can find work. However Stewart’s unsubstantiated claims highlight the perception that interactions between transient and Aboriginal communities are inevitably related to deviant sex.

Lateline also claimed that Aboriginal community leaders had informed them that the “sex trade” had developed in Walgett and in Coffs Harbour, but did not provide any evidence or statements to substantiate their claims (2008a). Walgett Elder, Virginia Robinson, later claimed that their town was not affected by a “sex trade” with truckies, but ‘child sexual abuse is a problem in the local community’ (ABC News 2008c). Robinson’s claims emphasise the ambiguity of media representations which use labels like ‘community leader’, ‘PhD student’, ‘police’ and ‘Elder’ to authorise and validate their representations, especially when these labels are manipulated by media to make unsubstantiated accusations and further the sensationalism of Aboriginal sexual relations (Lateline 2008a; 2008b). Stewart used these recognised labels of authority to validate his inaccurate perceptions of the “sex trade” in Aboriginal communities and to justify the media sensationalism of Aboriginal sex. The media’s use of labels highlights how certain labels can be used to manipulate and construct information to validate a particular subjective position. In the Lateline context whole Aboriginal communities are generically represented as firstly, part of a
“sex trade” with truckies, and secondly as containing sexual abuse. Deviant sexual activity remains infused in representations of these Aboriginal communities, where women and children are continually represented as victims of (white and black) male sexual attention and exploitation. The media’s deviant subtext takes away from claims of sexual exploitation in these communities and thus the right of Aboriginal women and girls to take legal action when unscrupulous men exploit them.

‘probably agreed’

In December 2007, it was reported that a ‘10-year-old Wik girl in Aurukun’ was raped ‘by three adults and six juvenile Wik males’ and the Judge on the case, Sarah Bradley, stated that the girl “‘probably agreed’ to have sex with them’ (Langton 2008a). In his report journalist David Curnow described the prosecutor Steve Carter telling Judge Bradley in the court sitting, that the offences were ‘childish experimentation’ and ‘naughty’ (Lateline 2008d). The representation of childish promiscuity that defines these discursive interactions reflects the colonial ideology that Aboriginal women could not be raped (Harris 1982:25; McGrath 1980:246).

The claim by Judge Bradley that the Wik girl ‘probably agreed’ to the sexual encounter, reflects Palmer’s 1884 analysis of Aboriginal women’s promiscuous sexuality during the colonial period (QPD 1884:107-108). However, though Palmer’s claims were uncontested in the colonial sitting, Judge Bradley’s rulings in the case were later overturned in the court of appeal (Lateline 2008d). The acknowledgement that a ‘miscarriage of justice’ took place by the court highlights the change in perceptions in Australian society. However Judge Bradley’s comments (Lateline 2008d) highlight that colonial ideologies still remain and can still have significant effects on Aboriginal women and girls in the present. In this particular case 9 rapists were initially not held accountable or prosecuted for their offences against a 10 year old Aboriginal girl.

‘model of the Oriental woman’

Said examined Flaubert’s ‘widely influential model of the Oriental woman’ and found that the ‘historical facts of domination’ allowed him to ‘speak for’ and represent the
feminine “other” (1985:6). Though contextually different, Stewart’s representation of Aboriginal women’s sexuality in his *Lateline* reports, reflects Said’s analysis of Flaubert, as they both ‘spoke for and represented’ the feminine “other” from a white male perspective (1985:6). Stewart used interviews with female Aboriginal residents, Elders and girls with alleged experience in the “sex trade”, to authorise and contextualise his allegations about the “sex trade” with truckies. Thus by ‘making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it’ Stewart effectively enforced his representation of Aboriginal sexuality and this ‘crisis in Aboriginal society’ (Langton 2008a).

Stewart’s reports underscore Langton’s (2008a) argument that ‘the crisis in Aboriginal society is a public spectacle’, with the lived reality of some Aboriginal communities used to validate unsubstantiated claims, like Stewart’s (*Lateline* 2008a), and to justify governmental policies, like the Northern Territory intervention (*ABC News* 2008b). As Langton (2008a) highlights, this ‘is not a new phenomenon in Australian society’. For example, in the colonial context the spread of European venereal diseases was seen as ‘a recognition that the colour line had been sexually broached’ (Evans 1975:99-102). Contemporarily the ‘increase’ of STDs in some communities was used to validate reports of child prostitution with truckies in the political and public sphere (*Lateline* 2008c). In both these colonial and contemporary examples STDs signify sexually deviant interactions between white males and Aboriginal women, which are seen to need government intervention (*Lateline* 2008c: *ABC News* 2008b). More importantly the focus on the need for government intervention in the media and government responses to the initial *Lateline* report highlights the disempowering role that constructions of Aboriginal sexuality and sexual relations could have on Aboriginal autonomy.

*Lateline’s* (2008a) use of Aboriginal voice seeks to establish authority and to legitimise their claims of an active “sex trade” in some communities in ‘a bid to stop girls as young as eight years of age being paid for sex’. However their manipulation of Aboriginal voice, as previously demonstrated, and their representation of Aboriginal communities as largely apathetic towards the issue, not only disempowers the young girls affected, but the community Elders who have tried to make a difference. By manipulating the authority of the position of ‘Elder’ in Aboriginal
communities to make unsubstantiated allegations, *Lateline* has undermined the importance and perceived validity of this position.

*Lateline* also further disempowered their main informant, by presenting her first as “Aboriginal girl four” who is drawn into the “sex trade” for drugs, and second as a “sex worker”, who is choosing to engage in this “sex trade” (2008a; 2008c). Their representations of girls engaging in the “sex trade” as drug users and prostitutes undermined and disempowered “Aboriginal girl fours” personal experiences of exploitation and rape (*Lateline* 2008a). In effect, these representations could further impact on her perception that she does not have the right to seek justice for rape, because people would say ‘a women had asked for it if you jumped into a truck’ (*Lateline* 2008a). Thus *Lateline*’s representations of the “sex trade” and their informants further undermined the ability of these Aboriginal girls to receive justice when exploited, by continually representing them as the gaining from their sexual agency.

The accounts of rape and sexual exploitation that permeate *Lateline*’s representations of Aboriginal girls in these reports highlight the ambiguity of white constructions of Aboriginal women’s sexuality. *Lateline*’s intentions in regards to the girls in Moree and Boggabilla were well explained, but by manipulating the facts and representing the girls as both “girls” and “sex workers” they undermine their own intentions (2008a; 2008c). They allege exploitation but present unfounded and unsubstantiated allegations, highlighting the “girl’s” sexual agency and gains from these encounters.

These reports and constructions of Aboriginal society have real effects in the present, especially for those Aboriginal girls who have been raped and had their right to justice undermined by similar representations, such as the Wik girl in Aurukun. Like the Aboriginal women represented in the previous chapter, these girls and women are defined as available for prostitution and inherently promiscuous, and as such they too it seems cannot be raped.

However it must be noted that media, to varying degrees, does consult and allow Aboriginal people, women in particular, to present their perspectives on the issues that effect them. The *Lateline* reports analysed previously are one example and another is

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4 Also in the transcript for the *Lateline* (2008c) program, the informants are not introduced or described in any manner during the program to assure their privacy.
Lateline’s interview with Germaine Greer and responses to her work discussed in the following chapter (2008e; 2008f). Unfortunately these examples also highlight how Aboriginal voice can be manipulated and undermined, especially when inaccurate and culturally insensitive research methods are employed.

**Conclusion**

Said argued that ‘colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism’ (1985:39), and I argue that the representations of Aboriginal women and girls as vulnerable and sexually deviant that are examined in this chapter, are similarly used to justify media sensationalism and governmental paternalism. The representation of Aboriginal ‘girls as young as eight years old’ prostituting themselves for money and drugs (Lateline 2008a), feeds into the continued sensationism of Aboriginal women’s sexuality as exotic, and open to sexual activity outside the moral constructions of the wider Australian community. Thus my analysis of contemporary media implies not only that colonial discourses have persisted in the media, but for the same ideological purpose; to highlight their vulnerability and promiscuity, which continue to have real consequences for Aboriginal women and girls. Hence rapists are not being prosecuted for their crimes under Australian law and Aboriginal women are being treated as inherently sexually deviant within the judicial and media discourses, and as such have been denied justice. In the next chapter I discuss and critique academic interactions with representations and the challenges they have previously and continue to face from female Aboriginal academics, who actively dispute any representation of Aboriginal people as passive, dis-empowered victims.
Chapter 4: Academic representations of Aboriginal women

Flaubert’s encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male and these were the historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was “typically oriental” (Said 1985:6).

Said’s critique of Flaubert’s work demonstrates how representations of the “other” can shape a whole ideology of knowing and representing the “other” in western discourse. In this chapter, focused on academic representations of Aboriginal women, Said’s analysis highlights why some communities are sensitive about western representations of their culture, especially when they produce inaccurate cultural constructions or inadvertently support racist stereotypes. However, Said’s analysis is inadequate to explain the complexities inherent in contemporary academic representations of Aboriginal women.

In this chapter, I focus on contemporary representations of Aboriginal women’s sexuality by white and Aboriginal academics; specifically how they have empowered or disempowered Aboriginal voice and agency. Their engagement with colonial discourses highlights a focus on empowering Aboriginal women through their academic representations. However, as demonstrated in this chapter, their works have not always achieved the desired outcome.

In the Bell/Huggins debate ‘white privilege’ was an underlying factor in the rejection by Huggins (et al 1991) of Bell’s assumption that she could speak on behalf of the “other”. Whilst Flaubert (Said 1985:6) could use his white privilege to construct the “other”, Bell’s attempt to do so was rejected by the development of a powerful Aboriginal academic discourse (Huggins et al 1991). Their rejection of white feminist constructions of Aboriginal women’s sexuality, based on cultural, historical and academic political considerations underscores Foucault’s argument that there is an inherent interrelationship between politics and sexuality (see 1990a: 1990b: 1990c). Here, I examine two academic representations of Aboriginal women, which link interrelated historical sources with the present; first from a feminist anthropological perspective, and second, from an Indigenous artists’ perspective. Whilst both present
strong political content regarding the political nature of sexuality, they present Aboriginal women and their sexual agency in very different ways.

**Diane Bell: *Daughters of the Dreaming* and ‘Speaking about rape is everyone’s business’**

Diane Bell is a feminist social anthropologist who argues that by ‘writing of Aboriginal women, [she] did not speak for, nor did [she] merely report’ but located ‘issues of gender and race within a wider perspective’ (1989:405). Bell’s PhD research formed the basis for her book *Daughters of the Dreaming*, on women (referred to here as ‘Warrabri women’) and ritual in the ‘Warrabri’ Aboriginal community of the Northern Territory, from 1976 to 1977 (1984:1, 7). The ‘Warrabri’ community is made up of four distinct languages and land groups; Warlpiri, Warumungu/Warlampana, Kaytej and Alyawarra (Bell 1984:7). Bell’s focus on Warrabri women within these groups illustrates her feminist methodological position and belief that ‘a female researcher may not work successfully with people of both sexes’, for fear of betraying sacred and gender based knowledge (Bell 1984: 33-6; Merlan 1988:26-7). Bell’s decision to work with women was also partly based on her critique of previous studies, which she argues ignored the cultural contribution of women to Aboriginal society (1984:23).

Bell maintains that her discussions with Warrabri women who remember early interactions with colonists informed her presentation of them as independently controlling their sexuality and entering into sexual relationships, including those with settlers, by choice (1984:69, 98). Bell argues that when recalling the past, men and women reconstructed women’s sexual liaisons with colonists differently, demonstrating divergent perceptions of agency and control over women’s sexuality (1984:69, 98,100). Warrabri women’s discourses demonstrated to Bell that sexual liaisons with colonists were for their own pleasure and profit, whilst Warrabri men argue that their women were taken from them by force (1984:69, 98,100). These gender specific discourses on sexual relationships with colonists demonstrate the complexities and limitations of gendered perspectives regarding the sexual activity of Aboriginal women.
Bell’s personal ties with Warrabri women led her to contextualise her relationship with Warrabri woman, Topsy Napurrula Nelson, as a friend and academic co-contributor. It was from this perspective that Bell and Nelson co-authored the article, ‘Speaking about rape is everyone’s business’ (1989:404-5). The majority of the paper is written in first person by Bell, with comments from Nelson interposed throughout in italics. Bell’s use of first person is supported by Nelson’s claim at a women’s writers’ conference in 1985, that their personal relationship facilitated their collaboration, as their ‘knowledge of the priorities of the other allowed us to respond with proper respect’ (1989:405). Nelson thus supported Bell’s approach to ‘write of’ her by using first person in the article (1989:405) and later in her response to critics, by stating that ‘I was telling Diane to write this story for me’ (1991:507).

Bell argued that Aboriginal women have lost the power to ‘administer their own justice, that is, women’s customary law, to the rapists’, through police protocols that place ‘accused males into protective custody’ (1989:412). In the case of intra-racial rape in Aboriginal communities, Bell argues that men’s use of ‘customary law’ defences (that the rape was an act of traditional culture), need to be examined to ensure that Aboriginal women received some form of justice (1989:412-4). Bell also analyses the use of ‘customary law’ in cases of violence against women, especially rape, and how anthropological insights can be used to clarify which situations are “tradition” and which are ‘local politics’ (1989: 414). Bell also examines ‘the image of the Black woman as chronically promiscuous’ and the lack of sympathy for ‘Aboriginal women raped when drunk’, to highlight the permissive attitudes of intra-racial rape in Aboriginal society, to demonstrate women’s vulnerability (1989:406,410). Bell’s focus on discourses on Aboriginal women’s sexuality within the judiciary system, especially the use of ‘customary law’ defences, is used to underline Justice Maurice’s reflection that ‘historically no one ever asks them [Aboriginal women]... what’s culturally acceptable behaviour’ (1989:411). Whilst Justice Maurice contends that Aboriginal women need to be consulted to ensure that the law can act appropriately on issues of ‘traditional law’, without being asked, some Aboriginal women have already presented their own constructions of their sexuality and lived experience through books and film.

I use Bell and Nelson when talking about the paper as a whole, but will use their individual names when analysing their individual contributions to the paper as highlighted.
Tracey Moffatt: ‘Nice Coloured Girls’

Tracey Moffatt is an Aboriginal visual artist (photographic and film) of international renown, whose artistic endeavours present complex images of Aboriginal women and their sexuality (Dia Art Foundation 2008). Moffatt’s (1987) short film ‘Nice Coloured Girls’ follows the movements of three young Aboriginal women on a night out in downtown Sydney, who use their sexuality to entice a white man or a “Captain” as they call him, to pay for their ‘good time’. Their “Captain” buys them drinks, dinner and finally pays for their ride home, when they steal his wallet as he passes out. They rob him but they ‘don’t feel sorry for him because he should be home with his family’; they are teaching him a lesson (Moffatt 1987). They turn the tables on racial derision that historically has defined them as sexually deviant and morally corrupt, by focusing on the amoral behaviour of their “Captain” to justify their economic profit (Moffatt 1987; Moreton-Robinson 2000:169). Moffatt’s use of Lieutenant William Bradley’s accounts of first settlement in Sydney, especially his depictions of Aboriginal women, establishes a sense of history, as does the girls’ use of the term “Captain” because ‘that’s what our Mothers and Grandmothers have always called them’ (1987).

In a scene of the film, Aboriginal women crudely clad in white fabric, climb up a ladder to visit the white men on a boat for sexual purposes (Moffatt 1987). We are told they will discard their “clothing” when they return to their communities (Moffatt 1987). Moffatt’s image of sexual relations is superimposed into the reality of contemporary Aboriginal women, who also, dressed in white and living in Sydney, use their knowledge of white men, informed by historical interactions, to extract benefits in the present. Moffatt’s interweaving of the past and the present depicts a continual practice, making a case that not all Aboriginal women were victimised or oppressed by their interactions with colonists, but in some cases may have been empowered by their access to goods and ability to discard their relationships, like they did their “clothing”.

Both, Bell and Moffatt’s works go to the core questions of my thesis: what it means to represent and be represented by another. Their work does this through their presentation of white feminist and Aboriginal perspectives on Aboriginal women’s
sexuality. Both Bell and Moffatt have been criticised for the confronting content of their works (see French 1992:1; Huggins et al 1991). In both cases, critics have viewed their work as feeding into negative stereotypes of Aboriginal women and men. A deeper analysis of these works and critiques of them underline a more complex account of Aboriginal women’s sexuality and how representations can be both empowering and disempowering.

**Interpretation of Bell and Moffatt’s representations**

Francesca Merlan, also an anthropologist, critiqued Bell’s feminist focus on Warrabri women’s independence in *Daughters of the Dreaming*, arguing that this perspective limited Bell’s capability to present a thorough ‘model of social relations’ of the Warrabri Aboriginal community (1988:26-7). Merlan argued that by not incorporating male perspectives into her model of social relations, Bell’s representation of female independence in the Warrabri community is partial (1988:26-9). Bell herself argued that discourses on Warrabri women’s sexuality were politicised by both men and women (1984:98-100). However throughout her work, she continued to quantify the women’s assertions of independence, ignoring the inherent complexities involved in social interactions, which disempowered the men’s perspectives.

Merlan also argued that Bell’s construction of the explicit ‘sexual content of women’s ritual’ as representing social upheaval, whilst disregarding the work of previous anthropologists as overly sexualised and unrepresentative, downplays the importance of the content (Bell 1984:232-34; Merlan 1988:27-8). Merlan supports her argument by highlighting how her work, and the work of others, concluded that sexual content in ritual is a ‘crucial area of the symbolic representation of intersexual relationships involving notions of control’ (1988:27-8). Merlan maintains that Bell’s decision to downplay the sexual content in women’s rituals, denies the right of Aboriginal women to explore and represent their sexuality in a cultural context, without white academia portraying it as amoral (1988:27). Thus by disregarding previous academic interactions on sexuality in ritual, Bell clearly defines her subjective feminist perspective on Aboriginal women as independent, and historically overly sexualised, and her right to represent them as such. However, Merlan’s critique argues against this by highlighting the limitations and inadequacies that feminist perspectives and a
disregard for the sexual content of ritual, can produce in anthropological fieldwork (1988:26-8). By using her own and others’ work to highlight the political nature of ‘intersexual relations’ and sexuality, Merlan underlines why a gender balanced perspective in fieldwork is necessarily important to achieve representative outcomes (1988:26-30).

In “Speaking about rape is everybody’s business” Bell’s feminist perspective was again considered inappropriate by some academics, and especially by some Aboriginal women (Huggins et al. 1991:506-7). Others argue that Bell’s analysis of rape among Aboriginal people represented a white perspective, defined and subject to Anglo-Celtic traditions and constructions (Fredericks and Croft 2002:2). Such constructions exist within definitions of power where whiteness is subject to privilege and a history of domination. By not interacting with Aboriginal people more widely in her research, Bell is seen as disempowering their right to deal with rape within an Aboriginal context (Fredericks and Croft 2002:2). Huggins (et al 1991:506) explored the limitations of Bell’s perspectives, by highlighting the entrenchment of her white privilege and the impracticability of focusing on gender issues alone, when the issue of racism is also important.

Huggins (et al 1991:506) also challenged Bell’s presentation of Nelson as the ‘authentic/ traditional Aboriginal voice’, who held the authority to speak on wider Aboriginal issues, like rape (Larbalestier 1990:147). They argue that Bell’s, and other academics’, lack of consultation with ‘urban’ and academic Aboriginal women, ignores and undermines the effects that colonisation has had on all Aboriginal people more generally (Huggins et al. 1991:507). More importantly for my thesis, Huggins (et al 1991) highlight how unrepresentative consultation practices could lead to inaccurate or insensitive representations of Aboriginal issues. Huggins (et al 1991) thus challenge white academics to acknowledge their voices and consult with them on Aboriginal issues.

Jan Larbalestier (1990:143-4), also an anthropologist, argues that there is an ambiguity inherent when white feminists attempt to ‘explore and represent social realities’ from what Huggins (et al 1991:506) term Bell’s ‘radical feminist... privileged white, middle class perspective’. A very recent example of such
representations is Germaine Greer’s essay “On Rage”, a defence of the ‘inherent tendencies of rage and violence’ of Aboriginal men, whilst representing the Aboriginal women who supported the Northern Territory intervention as contributors to their downfall (Greer 2008:88; see also Lateline 2008e). Marcia Langton (Aboriginal anthropologist) in her article to The Australian (2008b) and Judy Atkinson (Aboriginal academic), and Peter Sutton (anthropologist) on Lateline (2008f) publicly rejected Greer’s simplistic construction of Aboriginal males’ ‘rage’ as the effect of colonialism, and ‘portrayal of Indigenous peoples as only victims without personal responsibility’. They each (Langton 2008b; Lateline 2008e) argue that Greer’s (2008:16-7,81,91) presentation of the issues of violence disempowered both Aboriginal women and men by claiming male rage is inherent. Noel Pearson also argues that Greer offers no hope for the future, and downplays the need for governments and perpetrators of violence to take responsibility and protect victims (Greer 2008:35, 86; Pearson cited in Neill and Murphy 2008).

Greer’s work also challenges Huggins (et al 1991) argument that Aboriginal men and women have all suffered ‘grave injustices by the white invaders’, by arguing that Aboriginal men have suffered more deeply from colonialism. Thus Greer argues Aboriginal men should not be asked to control their rage, whilst Aboriginal women are represented as collaborating with the white bureaucracy (Greer 2008:62-4, 91; Lateline 2008e). Greer’s perspective of violence in Aboriginal communities also reflects Bell’s (1989) analysis of rape, as both allegedly use partial and limited data such as newspaper reports, perspectives from people not experiencing the situation first hand, and in the case of Greer, manipulating Aboriginal academic perspectives, to construct their feminist analyses (Langton 2008b). Greer also uses the media reports on the “sex trade” that I have examined to inform her readers that 'seasonal cotton workers and truckies... would accept ‘nothing over sixteen’” (2008:53). In the case of cotton chippers I clearly demonstrated in the preceding chapter that this was not the case. Thus Greer’s work highlights how indolent research can easily lead to inaccurate representations. Thus Huggins (et al 1991) challenge to Bell and her assumption that she could speak on the issue of rape contains many contextual challenges to Greer’s essay, which has also been rejected by academics, especially anthropologists, and highlights why the Bell/Huggins debate remains relevant.
More importantly for my thesis Greer’s (2008) and Bell’s (1989) works reflect those of Hunter (1968), Tench (1961) and Roth (1984a; 1984b; 1984c; 1984d), which all unknowingly underpinned the stereotype of the brutal Aboriginal male and victimised Aboriginal women. As demonstrated in chapter two, these representations of Aboriginal culture had devastating effects on Aboriginal women. Bell’s (1989) work was challenged (see Huggins et al 1991) for inadvertently presenting information that could reinforce colonial stereotypes on the ‘black rapist’ and the victimised and oppressed Aboriginal woman. In 1991 Huggins (et al) argued that Bell’s (1989) work disempowered the rights and ability of Aboriginal people to deal with rape within their communities and traditional laws. Now almost 20 years later Greer’s work has disempowered the rights of Aboriginal women to speak up and receive justice when they are subject to personal violence and sexual assault, by stating that Aboriginal men are violent by nature and we should not ask them to repress this type of behaviour (2008:35, 89, 91). Their works could unwittingly support the need for governmental control, such as the Northern Territory intervention which echoes the government policies from the early 20th century, by detailing the many ways that Indigenous communities have been unable to overcome violence and sexual assault.

History thus repeats itself in these new academic forms and continues to disempower Aboriginal women by spreading and reinventing colonial stereotypes. Historically and contemporarily these representations underpinned bureaucratic control over Indigenous peoples. More importantly Bell’s focus on ‘traditional law’ defences by white lawyers highlights how white men have continued to use their constructions of traditional culture to deny the right of Aboriginal women to receive justice when sexually assaulted. By consistently propagating the belief that Aboriginal women can not be raped, by stating that they are traditionally subject to forced sexual encounters, white justifications for rape are disempowering the rights and ability of Aboriginal women to say no to unwanted sexual advances. The examples I have given highlight the continuation of a culture of oppression of Aboriginal women by government agencies, particularly the justice system and government bureaucracy.

Though Bell’s and Nelson’s article (1989) has been challenged for many of the reasons discussed previously, Bell’s argument on the need for female perspectives on ‘traditional law’ defence in rape cases is also examined by Aboriginal academic
Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2002). Moreton-Robinson engages with Sharon Payne’s argument that ‘Indigenous women are subject to three types of law: “white man’s law, traditional law and bullshit law, the latter being used to describe a distortion of traditional law used as a justification for assault and rape of women” (Payne cited in Moreton-Robinson 2002:170). Moreton-Robinson argues that by having white lawyers justify rape by claiming it ‘is part of “murri love-making”’ and is not as hurtful or serious for Indigenous women as it is for white women’ supports stereotypes of deviant Aboriginal women (2002:170).

More importantly for my thesis, both Bell and Moreton-Robinson underline the need for Aboriginal women to voice misconceptions on their traditional rights and to be asked ‘what’s acceptable conduct according to the values of’ their communities (Maurice cited in Bell and Nelson 1989:411; Moreton-Robinson 2002:170-1). Thus a collaborative effort between anthropologists and Aboriginal women could help to identify ‘bullshit law’ and help to achieve more culturally and personally appropriate outcomes for Aboriginal women. If judicial rigour could incorporate such perspectives Aboriginal women could be empowered and emboldened to claim their rights under an appropriate and representative legal system, and Bell’s call to speak out on rape could finally be heard in an appropriate manner (see Atkinson 1990a; 1990b).

By analysing white Australian feminism from her position as an Aboriginal academic, Moreton-Robinson (2002:3) also readdressed the issues raised in the Bell/ Huggins debate by asserting the authority of Aboriginal women’s ‘life writings’ (e.g. biography, auto-biography; see, for example, Cole, Haskins and Paisley 2005:xxiii). Moreton-Robinson explored how ‘Indigenous women’s life writings challenge and disrupt ... anthropological representations of the “Indigenous woman” ... through their self-presentation in a counter hegemonic discourse’ (2002:3). Moreton-Robinson’s work itself distinguishes ‘between how one represents one-self through interpretation as opposed to how one is represented by another’, by contradicting representations in the dominant discourse, and presenting herself as an empowered Aboriginal woman (2002:xxii). Likewise, Moffatt’s film represents a challenge to colonial and contemporary discourses on Aboriginal women’s sexuality, by constructing a reality where the sexual relationships of the past have provided contemporary Aboriginal
women with the skills and confidence to use their sexuality, without being represented as victimised.

Lisa French, a cinema studies academic, argues that though some have criticised Moffatt’s film as an ‘endorsement of exploitation ... reinforcing negative stereotypes of amoral Aboriginal women’, Moffat’s work is a reassessment of how historical sources persist in constructions of Aboriginal women’s identity and sexuality (1992:4). French argues that Moffatt’s film ultimately explores how dominant representations, which have both excluded Aboriginal people or constructed ‘unrealistic images’ of Aboriginal identity in colonial discourses continue to inform constructions of Aboriginal people in the present (1992:7). By intertwining dominant images of the past with images of contemporary urban Aboriginal women, Moffatt illustrates a continuum of practice, with her Aboriginal actors defining their interactions with their “Captains” in both contexts.

Moffatt illustrates the absence of Aboriginal voice in the early history of Australia’s settlement, by juxtaposing this against the recollections of a colonist, Lieutenant William Bradley (1987). French argues that the film illustrates the ‘naivety and self-deception of the writers of ...colonial documents’ and challenges the validity of these early constructions which portray Aboriginal women as victims, by emphasizing their ability ‘to undermine and subvert racial prejudices to their own advantage’ (1992:2). More importantly for my thesis, Moffatt (1987) highlights how Aboriginal women’s presentations of “self” are continually linked to historical images and representations of their sexuality by themselves and others.

Foucault’s examination of moral discourse asserts that sexuality is ‘a result and an instrument of power’s design’ with sex ‘being the center around which sexuality distributes its effects’ (Foucault 1990a:152). In the Australian context, historical representations of sexuality were proliferated to promote the availability of Aboriginal women for sex, and define gendered race relations. Moffatt’s complex and confronting representations of political and sexual issues explores discourses on Aboriginal women’s sexuality and gender and how they ‘contribute significantly to how societies establish the ‘truth’ of the subject, and the norms for the relations that subjects should have with themselves and others’ (Danaher Schirato and Webb
In Moffatt’s (1987) film, her subject’s relations with white men are defined by moral discourses, those of the past which defined them as promiscuous, and those they construct in the present that validate their behaviour at the cost of their “Captain”, which are intrinsically linked to their sexuality in the present and sexual relations in the past. Huggins (et al 1991) relations with white academics are also defined by moral discourses, especially in the case of Bell’s (1989:404) article, where her reason for speaking on these issues came from her moral argument for the need for someone to break the silence.

Bell’s and Moffatt’s works both highlight how Aboriginal women counter colonial moral discourses by highlighting their own agency and empowerment in sexual liaisons with colonists, and why that history matters (Merlan 1988:18). They also underline the political nature of moral discourse by constructing and validating their arguments to reflect on the amoral behaviour of the other, such as the “Captain” in Moffatt’s (1987) work, or themselves, such as Bell’s argument that remaining silent on rape would be ‘tantamount to complicity’ (1989:404). However, Bell’s arguments in “Speaking about rape is everybody’s business” arguably disempowered the Aboriginal women she seeks to empower in Daughters of the Dreaming, through its lack of consultation with Aboriginal women outside ‘traditional’ communities and especially communities who are dealing with the effects of inter-racial rape (see Atkinson 1990a; 1990b). Bell’s contradictory representations of Aboriginal women’s independence and control over their sexuality defines the ambiguity of white feminist perspectives, especially when they focus on issues that have traditionally subjugated, objectified and disempowered those people they seek to empower. The importance of history is thus illustrated by Bell (1984), Moffatt (1987) and Huggins (et al. 1991), who all highlight the relevance of history for them in the present, and underline my proposition in this thesis that history continues to affect Aboriginal women in varying ways.

Potential ways forward

As early as 1983, anthropologist Francoise Dussart argued that an understanding of Aboriginal women required a male perspective. Thus Dussart redefined her study of the ‘symbolic vocabulary of [Warlpiri] women’s body painting’, initially focused on
women, to ensure that an ‘effort toward inclusiveness’ prevailed in her work (2000:1, 5). Dussart thus ‘tried to integrate the voices of men, who often amplified, corroborated, or contradicted the observations made by [her] principal women informants’ (2000:11). Dussart moved away from the dichotomous feminist methodologies of Bell to ensure that her ‘entangled variables of kinship and gender’ drew ‘connections rather than separations’, to appreciate how the ‘currency of knowledge is distributed and withheld by (and among) men and women’ (2000:10-3). Dussart’s work is one example of how anthropologists have been developing inclusive practices when engaging in research projects with Aboriginal people, based on their awareness that collaboration is the key to understanding.

Jackie Huggins and Kay Saunders, on the other hand, have presented a collaborative model for Indigenous and white female academics, in their article ‘Defying the ethnographic ventriloquists: Race, Gender and the legacies of colonialism’ (1993). Saunders and Huggins each address ‘how Anglo-Australian feminists often fail to conceptualise themselves and their historical subjects ethically’ from their different perspectives. Saunders demonstrates this by accepting and detailing her personal heritage, via a relative who actively disenfranchised Aboriginal people. Saunders then develops an historical analysis of colonialism in Australia (1993:63). She writes that

…have resolutely persisted in denying that white women were equally the dispossessors and the invaders. In their attempts to portray all (read white) women as the victims of patriarchal oppression, practitioners of women’s history have singularly been unable to contemplate their actually white subjects as active agents in the destructive colonial process. (Saunders 1993:63)

In the Bell/Huggins debate, Huggins (et al) highlighted the need for white women to accept that ‘You were, and still are, part of that colonising force’ (1991:506). Huggins (et al 1991:506) argued that white women’s position as agents in the colonial process made them just as oppressive as white men, and in ‘many cases... worse then men in their treatment of Aboriginal women, particularly in the domestic service field’. Thus there is a particular need for white female academics to demonstrate their awareness of historical issues of oppression and consult with Aboriginal women on issues that involve them.
How academia has reassessed the way they represent the “other” in Australia is typified in works like *Uncommon Ground* (Cole *et al* 2005). By developing Aboriginal voice in their analysis of Australian history, academics are acknowledging their subjectivity and trying to write from a self aware standpoint that accepts their position of power whilst trying to ‘desegregate the arena of Aboriginal history’ which still maintains an influence in the present (Cole *et al* 2005:xv). Their collaborative model is one way in which Aboriginal people, women in particular, can interact with academics and media outlets to achieve their separate goals with transparency and understanding.

Their approach seeks to move beyond the Bell/Huggins debate and represent Aboriginal women without a colonial subtext that defines them as passive victims. Aboriginal women are active and powerful agents of their own identity, sense of culture and sense of “self”, as demonstrated by Langton (2008a, 2008b), Moreton-Robinson (2002), Moffatt (1987), Huggins (1991) and others in this thesis. Ultimately best practice needs to ensure that Aboriginal women are consulted on issues that impact on and represent them, so that their voice can be heard and can arbitrate on the collection and distribution of knowledge in an appropriate and dignified manner. Thus inclusive collaboration processes provide us with a key to overcoming the inadequacy of historical ideologies, and paving the way forward in our academic relationships with Aboriginal people and their culture.

**Conclusion**

Moffatt’s and Bell’s confronting representations of sex and sexuality, and the critiques of their work, highlight not only the political nature of representation, but also how representations of Aboriginal women’s sexuality are historically and contemporarily defined by moral discourses. In this chapter I have also worked to demonstrate how moral constructions of Aboriginal women’s sexuality and ‘sex could serve as a weapon of empowerment or disempowerment’ (Forman 2006:119). I have worked to demonstrate the need for white academics to better understand and appreciate the history of racial oppression in Australia, and work with Aboriginal people with this perspective in mind, and provided examples of academics doing so.
The wider implications of these representations, which have been engendered and challenged by these discourses, is analysed in the next chapter.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this thesis I have argued that colonial discourses have had detrimental effects for Aboriginal women in the past and that these persist in new guises, in the present. Thus throughout my thesis I have endeavoured to demonstrate the continuity of historical representations in the present; both in media and academic representations of Aboriginal women’s sexual liaisons, as well as how Aboriginal women represent themselves within discourses on their sexuality. My thesis also highlights how white academics in particular, need to be aware of the effects of these discourses on Aboriginal women, both historically and contemporarily. Here I address the implications of my preceding analyses of historical and contemporary representations of Aboriginal women’s sexuality, and how such representations continue to affect Aboriginal women in the present.

Implications

In this thesis I have demonstrated the effects that colonial representations, based on inaccurate and stereotypical generalisations of Indigenous women as promiscuous and victimised, are having in the present. By analysing representations from widely varying mediums, I have underlined how representations from each of these have had a significant impact on Aboriginal women, particularly, as argued in this thesis; on their ability to receive justice when raped. Historical accounts, media reports and academic research have all unknowingly come together to undermine the right of Aboriginal women to receive justice, to varying degrees and in very different ways.

Historically, discursive representations of Aboriginal women, underlined by preconceived colonial constructions of the ‘oriental other’, led to their sexual exploitation and victimisation. Colonists’ constructions of Aboriginal society were used to excuse and actively promote the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women. The result was that the rape and sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women was largely accepted by governments, the justice system and colonial society, who deemed that the status of Aboriginal women as the above, meant they could not be raped.
One hundred years after Roth’s graphic depictions of female initiation in colonial Queensland, contemporary media, in the form of *Lateline*, has highlighted the ambiguity of addressing Aboriginal issues, as they represent the girls they want to help as deviant prostitutes. By defining the sexual behaviour of the Aboriginal women and girls in the communities as deviant and drug induced, *Lateline* shifted the responsibility from the perpetrators, to an act of agency and choice by their female Aboriginal victims. Consequently these *Lateline* reports undermined the right of these Aboriginal girls to claim exploitation and rape, by detailing the many ways they exploited the men who entered their communities. They also undermined the validity of the labels of authority they used to support their claims, by manipulating labels like ‘Elder’ to make unsubstantiated and contrasting claims.

The ability to undermine one’s intentions is typified by Greer (2008), a feminist, who argues against the intervention, and consequently disempowered the rights of Aboriginal women and children to receive government protection when they are victims of male Aboriginal violence. Huggins (*et al* 1991) argued that some academics, like Bell (1989), have presented issues that could support the reinvention of the colonial stereotype of the brutal Aboriginal male and victimised Aboriginal women (see Greer 2008). By speaking about rape, Huggins (*et al* 1991) argued that Bell (1989) disempowered the right of Aboriginal people to deal with rape and violence in their communities. More importantly for this thesis, Huggins (*et al* 1991) argued that by presenting rape from a white perspective, Bell disempowered those she sought to help. Bell inadvertently made it harder for other white academics to try and deal with the issue of rape, for fear of a backlash if they repeated Bell’s mistake. That something needs to be done is evident, and in the previous chapter I outlined some collaborative strategies that may provide new ways forward to help Aboriginal women present their cultural understandings of rape and ensure that ‘traditional law’ does not become a way out for Aboriginal rapists.

That these issues need to be dealt with by Aboriginal people and academics from a foundation of mutual understanding of what is best practice when dealing with these issues, is thus determined. Works like Judy Atkinson’s (1991a, 1991b) have dealt with this issue from an Aboriginal perspective with thorough research methods which have identified the issues and proposed culturally appropriate methods to overcome
them. Without collaborating with Aboriginal people, important issues like rape may be ignored and subjugated to a realm of lesser importance as the right to speak up for misrepresentations comes to the fore.

Together these different and complex representations of Aboriginal women combine to assert an even more complex perspective on history’s impact on the present. More importantly for my thesis they collude and integrate, perhaps in many cases inadvertently, to disempower the right of Aboriginal women and girls to gain access to justice. By ignoring the past, it has become part of a very real present for Aboriginal women in Australia.

That colonial discourses persist was clearly demonstrated by the Aurukun rape case. The Aurukun case highlights how these representations can have real effects for Aboriginal women and girls, in this case their ability to receive justice on an equal footing with other Australian women, and why this needs to be addressed by media and academia alike. Though media is limited to reporting on events, academics have both a professional and moral stake in Aboriginal issues, especially in judicial cases where anthropology is sometimes called to act as the arbiter of what is traditional sexual behaviour and what is not (Bell and Nelson 1989:414). Academia thus has the power to impact on Aboriginal women, and most importantly their right to receive justice.

My thesis has also detailed the challenges that academics have faced from Aboriginal women who object to the continuation of the colonial practice of representing Aboriginal women from a white perspective. These challenges also highlight why Aboriginal women are sensitive about representations that reconstruct Aboriginal voice, like the Bell (1989) and Greer (2008) examples, to enforce white constructions and views on Aboriginal issues (see Huggins et al 1991; Moreton-Robinson 2002). These challenges highlighted the need for white academics, and feminists in particular, to understand and acknowledge their involvement in Australia’s history of oppression.

As my research demonstrates, history is important to the Aboriginal women who lived it and are dealing with the repercussions of that history in terms of the stereotypical
representations of their sexuality. As Huggins (*et al* 1991:507) states ‘Don’t let white stereotypes continue to reign supreme about Aboriginals’. While most academics (see Cole *et al* 2005; and Saunders 1993), especially anthropologists (see Dussart 2000), have heeded Huggins (*et al*) call, some academics in other spheres have not. Works like Greer’s (2008) “On Rage” continue to support stereotypes of the victimised, and in her work, present passive Aboriginal people, with no control over their lives or their actions. Consequently academics cannot only remain aware of the historical ambiguity that makes Aboriginal people wary of their constructions of Aboriginal culture. They must also actively pursue *collaborative* endeavours with Aboriginal people from a perspective that understands and incorporates their awareness of these issues.

Though Bell’s collaborative endeavour with Nelson is one example of the conflict that can occur even in collaborative processes, much can be learnt from their underestimation of the furor it would cause. Thus collaborative processes need to engage research subjects from a wide variety of socio-economic and geographical perspectives. By engaging a wider Aboriginal perspective on Indigenous issues, anthropologists could mitigate and facilitate these perspectives so that more thorough, appropriate and representative understandings could emerge in the future, and help more Aboriginal women receive justice when raped.

**Limitations and future possible research**

The previous chapters demonstrated the effects of colonial discourses and the issues Aboriginal writers have raised about contemporary representations. However the parameters of this thesis are inadequate to address the effects that media and academic representations of Aboriginal women’s sexuality have on Aboriginal women outside of the literature examined within this thesis. As I have not actively engaged Aboriginal women on this issue, I am unable to develop a more thorough or representative model of the effects on Aboriginal women, as published accounts are incapable of providing a wider, more inclusive perspective.

Though limited, my thesis has highlighted more complex issues of Aboriginal women’s sexuality, especially the lack of literature on this subject. Literature and
studies about how Aboriginal people see and experience their sexuality are relatively scant. Potentially further study to fill this gap in the literature would be desirable, especially research that targets Aboriginal women on a wide social scale. Further possible research could also look at what the prevalence of representations of Aboriginal women as sexually deviant say about Australian culture more generally, specifically the sensationalism of Aboriginal sex when it involves white men.

In conclusion my thesis has demonstrated why historical and contemporary representations of Aboriginal women’s sexuality need to be considered when media and academia, and anthropology in particular, investigate these issues, and the implications they have for Aboriginal women. Thus my thesis incorporates an analysis of gendered race relations in Australian history, and an acknowledgement of how this history continues to be relevant for Aboriginal women and more importantly continue to affect Aboriginal women and girls. However people from varied perspectives are challenging these antiquated discourses and trying to develop new ways forward with inclusive not exclusive practices with Aboriginal people.
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