Writing Past Colonialism Series

Series editors: Phillip Darby, Margaret Thornton and Patrick Wolfe, Institute of Postcolonial Studies, Melbourne

The leitmotiv of the series is the idea of difference – differences between cultures and politics, as well as differences in ways of seeing and the sources that can be drawn upon. In this sense, it is postcolonial. Yet the space we hope to open up is one resistant to new orthodoxies, one that allows for alternative and contesting formulations. Though grounded in studies relating to the formerly colonized world, the series seeks to extend contemporary global analyses.

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SETTLER COLONIALISM
AND THE
TRANSFORMATION
OF ANTHROPOLOGY

The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event

Patrick Wolfe

CASSELL
London and New York
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INTRODUCTION

Text and Context

ANTHROPOLOGY AND SETTLER COLONIALISM

This book is a history not so much of anthropology itself as of its ideological entanglements. It charts historically shifting ways in which an evolving tradition of metropolitan anthropology was turned to local ends at different stages in the development of Australian settler colonialism. The specificity is important. For all the homage paid to heterogeneity and difference, the bulk of 'post'-colonial theorizing is disabled by an oddly monolithic, and surprisingly unexamined, notion of colonialism. This would seem to spring from two distinct sources. The first is a pervasive Eurocentrism — or, as we might better term it, Occidentocentrism — on the part of academic theorists, for whom colonialism figures, narcissistically, as a projection (the Western will to power, etc.). The second consists in the historical accident (or is it?) that the native founders of the postcolonial canon came from franchise or dependent — as opposed to settler or creole — colonies. This gave these guerrilla theoreticians the advantage of speaking to an oppressed majority on the supply of whose labour a colonizing minority was vulnerably dependent. For Amil Cabral (1973: 40), for instance, genocide of the natives could only be counterproductive, creating 'a void which empties foreign domination of its content and its object: the dominated people'. Analogously, (in this regard at least), when Frantz Fanon asserted (1967: 47) that 'colonization and decolonization are simply a question of relative strength', he was referring to relative capacities for violence, on which basis the colonizer was ultimately superfluous. Given certain African contexts, especially in the 1960s, the material grounds for such optimism can reasonably be credited. But what if the colonizers are not dependent on native labour? — indeed, what if the natives themselves have been reduced to a small minority whose survival can hardly be seen to furnish the colonizing society with more than a remission from ideological embarrassment?

In contrast to the kind of colonial formation that Cabral or Fanon confronted, settler colonies were not primarily established to extract surplus value from indigenous labour. Rather, they are premised on displacing indigenes from (or replacing them on) the land; as Deborah Bird Rose points out (1991: 46), to get in the way all the native has to do is stay at home. The relationship between Native and African Americans illustrates the distinction particularly well. In the main, Native (North) Americans were cleared from their land rather than exploited for their labour, their place being taken by

1 Since the situation of Indigenous people is the operative factor, this classification cuts across Richard Price’s cogent (1961: 50) distinction between ‘colonies of exploitation’ and ‘colonies of settlement’.
displaced Africans who provided the labour to be mixed with the expropriated land, their own homelands having yet to become objects of colonial desire. The ramifications of this distinction flow through, particularly in so far as they affect the different constructions of ‘miscegenation’ that have been applied to the two communities. Briefly, whilst the one-drop rule has meant that the category ‘black’ can withstand unlimited admixture, the category ‘red’ has been highly vulnerable to dilution. This is consistent with a situation in which, whilst black labour was commodified (so that white plantation owners fathered black children), red labour was not even acknowledged (so that white fathers generated so-called ‘half-breeds’ whose indigeneity was compromised). In Australia the structural counterparts to African slaves were white convicts, which has meant that racial coding and questions of emancipation have operated quite differently between the two countries. Where the respective Indigenous populations have been concerned, however, there are substantial similarities between the racial calculations on which official policies have been premised. In the Indigenous case, it is difficult to speak of an articulation between colonizer and native since the determinate articulation is not to a society but directly to the land, a precondition of social organization. Since it is incoherent to talk of an articulation between humans and things, this social relationship can be conceived of as a negative articulation. Settler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of native societies. The split tenses reflects a determinate feature of settler colonization. The colonizers come to stay – invasion is a structure not an event. In contrast, for all the hollow formality of decolonization, at least the legislators generally change colour. Such distinctions ramify throughout the different colonial formations concerned. They are particularly apparent at the level of ideology – the romance of extinction, for instance (the dying race, the last of his tribe, etc.), encodes a settler-colonial imperative that would be confounded by the hyperfemininity, natural sense of rhythm, etc. that are typically attributed to slave races.

If we are to take the heterogeneity of different colonial formations seriously, we cannot use morphological generalizations such as ‘the level of ideology’ without qualification. Since any given colonial formation at any given time constitutes a specific configuration of elements and relations, we should expect that distinctions as to the workings of different ideologies will not be confined to their representational contexts. Rather, the mechanics, location and relative efficacy of ideology itself – regardless of its specific contents – will vary between different colonial formations whose ‘levels’ will not necessarily be commensurable. In this respect, settler colonies’ relative immunity to the withdrawal of native labour is highly significant. As noted, this immunity contrasts sharply with the master–slave structuring of Fanon’s schema, in which the colonist ‘owes the fact of his very existence, that is to say his property, to the colonial system’ (1967: 28). In the settler-colonial economy, it is not the colonist but the native who is superfluous. This means that the sanctions practically available to the native are ideological ones. In settler-colonial formations, in other words, ideology has a higher systemic weighting – it looms larger, as it were – than in other colonial formations. In the most extreme cases, this means that for the native ideology is all there is: the zero-sum conflict with the settler is constituted at the level of ideology and is waged around the issue of assimilation.

Where survival is a matter of not being assimilated, positionality is not just central to the issue – it is the issue. In a settler-colonial context, the question of who speaks goes far beyond liberal concerns with equity, dialogue or access to the academy. Claims to authority over indigenous discourse made from within the settler-colonial academy necessarily participate in the continuing usurpation of indigenous space (invasion is a structure not an event). This theoretical conclusion is abundantly borne out by the Australian academy’s deep involvement in successive modalities of settler-colonial discourse. Whether by accident or design, whether by measuring, quantifying, pathologizing, expunging or essentializing, a comprehensive range of authorities – anthropologists in particular, but also historians, biologists, archaeologists, psychologists, criminologists, the whole Foucauldian line-up – have produced an incessant flow of knowledge about Aborigines that has become available for selective appropriation to warrant, to rationalize and to authenticate official definitions, policies and programmes for dealing with ‘the Aboriginal problem’.

In tracing anthropology’s ideological entanglements, I am concerned with the discipline’s public impact rather than with the private contingencies (the unpublished letters, etc.) that participated in its production. My tribe is the anthropologists. I am trying to explore some of the cultural relations of anthropological practice, especially in so far as they continue to affect the present. Since this means that (pace George Stocking) I am doing Whig history, I should explain that, rather than reordering the past in the light of the present, I am hoping to do the reverse – to trace the genealogies of certain classic anthropological narratives whose ideological half-lives continue into the present. My ultimate concern is with the present as it selects out of the past.

Anthropology is analysed here, in a manner adapted from Marcel Mauss, as a total discursive practice: in this case one that encodes and reproduces the hegemonic process of colonial settlement. Anthropological debates are, therefore, my primary data rather than a means to a shared end. I neither attempt to answer the questions that anthropologists have asked themselves nor arbitrate in their disputes, since to do so would be to analyse Indigenous, as opposed to anthropological, discourse – a practice which, as will become
clear, is inescapably invasive in the Australian context, a context in which there can be no innocent discourses on Aboriginality. The object of analysis is an anthropological construct and not any presumptive Indigenous precedent. Indigenous discourses only intrude into the analysis when they submit to anthropological language, at which point they acquire significance in relation to oppositions and associations that have developed within the colonizing culture. As we follow these associations through, anthropology begins to emerge as a kind of soliloquy – as Western discourse talking to itself. This is not to suggest that there was no dialogue, that nothing transpired between natives and anthropologists in the field. That would be absurd. The point is that there is little if any evidence of these dialogues having had any impact on anthropological theory. Not only are they insufficient to account for the theory’s development but, even as a partial explanation, they are redundant. Anthropology’s distinctive theoretical features are already overdetermined by its own internal conversation.7

Hence there are both political and methodological reasons for stressing that the object of analysis is an anthropological construction. Moreover, the two converge. Any attempt on my part to recuperate a pristine Indigenous trace from behind the surface of the anthropological text – any slippage, as Gayatri Spivak (1988: 288) put it, ‘from rendering visible the mechanism to rendering vocal the individual’ – would not only be invasive. It would also be empirically self-defeating – the soliloquy is self-sufficient and endlessly recursive; interrogating it only leads to more of the same. Thus the insistence on discourse analysis is not merely some moral or political scruple that can be distinguished from scholarly investigation. Whilst it may be such a thing, it is also a necessary outcome of methodological rigour.

In preference to ventriloquizing the native, then, this book seeks to unpick the fabric of anthropological theory. Thus texts – more specifically, the propositional structuring of anthropological arguments – are central. This is not to divorce the analysis from the realms of the practical, the historical or the socioeconomic. On the contrary, the opposition between the discursive and the practical – including such variants as the ideal versus the material, the cultural versus the instrumental and so on – is a false one. Representations dialectically inform the understandings that permeate practical activity, and vice versa. In the wake of Clifford and Marcus’ (1986) Writing Culture, a distinctive mode of analysis has become so caught up in (con)textual pragmatics that it seems to forget that anthropological practice is substantially determined by the fact that anthropologists think, write and represent through and against theoretical formations that have specific propositional genealogies. To say this is not to lapse into the reactionary mysticism that sees texts as immaculately conceived. It is rather to insist on the centrality of logical and epistemological considerations to the practical historical conditions that inform the conduct of anthropology. Whilst observing the observers in the field, we should not lose sight of them in the library.

7 This is quite apart from the fact that such dialogue as did take place was hopelessly imbalanced – that, as Marx might have put it, the natives had their own points of view but not under conditions of their own choosing.

8 In this connection, see also Thornton (1983: 513–14).
anthropology has developed techniques for tracking the subtle mediations whereby ostensibly separate social institutions and practices ultimately interact with each other within the all-enveloping ether of culture. It seems unlikely that another discipline could be better equipped to account for the cultural conditions of its own possibility, or to trace through the wider implications and consequences of its own practice.

The wider context of analysis is the heterogeneous phenomenon of colonialism. Within this world-historical framework, we will focus on the selections, intersections and contingencies whereby the global scope of anthropological theory came to be whittled down for local appropriation to Australian settler-colonial ends. The observation that colonial formations promote contextually specific ideologies entails that different modes of anthropology have taken hold in different colonial contexts.\(^9\) This applies both spatially and historically – ideological regimes vary not only between colonial sites but across time within the same site. A complex picture begins to emerge in which, alongside the political and socioeconomic changes that transformed global and local contexts alike from around the turn of the twentieth century, anthropological theory underwent a major paradigm shift, in which evolutionism gave way to a range of relativistic methodologies. As we shall see, this shift occurred partly as a result of the precipitation of contradictions that were internal to the evolutionary paradigm and partly in response to the series of global transformations that were reconstituting modernity as a whole. Thus we will be tracing a shifting and often indirect set of connections between, on the one hand, a developing and substantially autonomous anthropological tradition and, on the other hand, the wider scientific and sociopolitical processes in which this tradition participated at both local and global levels.

Chapter 1 opens with the ethnographic event that serves to organize the analysis as a whole. Spencer and Gillen’s assertion that the Arunta of Central Australia were unaware of the physiological cause of conception brought together a wide range of evolutionary-anthropological themes at the same time as it inaugurated what was to become one of the great debates of twentieth-century relativism. On the local level, Spencer was not only an anthropologist but an adviser to the Australian government on Aboriginal affairs, in which capacity he made recommendations that were to have fateful implications for the assimilation policy, under which, for most of the twentieth century, Australian officials sought to break up Indigenous families. The chapter retraces the theoretical genealogy that framed the anthropological discovery and the political genealogy that produced the assimilation policy in order to characterize the mutuality between them. With this mutuality established in a preliminary way, Chapter 2 situates it in the widest of global contexts, emphasizing the changes that independently transformed both Western science and Western imperialism as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, and relating these two sets of changes to the paradigm shift that reordered Western anthropology in the same period. Within this wider context, the following three chapters retrace the fabrication of evolutionary-anthropological theory. Chapter 3 reconstructs the theoretical career of the doctrine of mother-right, which, though dominating evolutionary anthropology, was not to survive the paradigm shift. Unsurprisingly, the chapter finds that mother-right owed its hegemony over late nineteenth-century anthropology to the gender politics of the day. Yet it also emerges that this was not all that was going on, since developments in the struggle for women’s rights combined with theoretical contradictions that were purely internal to evolutionary anthropology in a way that presaged the collapse of that paradigm. Chapter 4, which traces the theoretical origins of the concept of totemism, plumbs the opposite extreme to Chapter 2. In this chapter, rather than geopolitics, the text is all there is. Totemism emerges as the most internal of anthropological conversations, a pure soliloquy that reveals most clearly how text is also context, with specific effects of its own. Chapter 5 analyses both the academic politics and the logical structure of E.B. Tylor’s concept of survivals, an evolutionary byword that was destined to succumb to the paradigm shift. In its failure to persist into twentieth-century anthropology, the concept has much to tell us about the differences between the successive paradigms and their respective engagements with colonized people. In Chapter 6, we return full-circle to Australia, charting the historically shifting ways in which the anthropological constructs whose theoretical production we have been studying came to be selectively incorporated into local settler-colonial discourse.

By the time we return to Australia at the beginning of Chapter 6, anthropology’s theoretical development will have emerged as autonomous to the extent that no necessary or foreordained connection can be said to have linked it to Australian politics. None the less, the two have always been crucially linked, to the extent that Australian Aboriginal policies have consistently been informed by anthropological representations of Aboriginal society. Thus the relative independence of the chapters on anthropology from those on Australian history is a function of the contingent relations between the two—their linkage is a product of history rather than of necessity. To make them seem naturally or intrinsically connected would be misleading. In stressing both the theoretical autonomy and the practical interweaving of anthropology and colonialism, what follows is an argument against determinacy and in favour of context and of selection. To that extent, this book itself aspires to a kind of Darwinism.

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\(^9\) Comparably, Bruce Trigger (1984) argues that archaeology is strongly influenced by the position that the society in which it is practised occupies within the capitalist world-system.
Late in 1896, on an Aboriginal ceremonial ground in Central Australia, Spencer and Gillen made an extraordinary discovery. They were observing the last great Intichiuma ritual, a swansong to savagery staged for their benefit by the men of the Arunta tribe. In the course of the proceedings, the two ethnographers came across ‘the idea firmly held that the child is not the direct result of intercourse, that it may come without this’ (Spencer and Gillen 1899: 265).

At that moment – though not for long afterwards – such astounding ignorance was without parallel in the ethnographic record. Bespeaking, as it seemed to, the deepest recesses of prehistory, it rounded off the Arunta’s status as the ultimate in living savagery. A century later, however, Spencer and Gillen’s ethnographic coup points more to the history of anthropology than to any credible version of prehistory. Thus it was not only the fruit of a well-organized venture into ethnographic fieldwork, but it inaugurated one of the most resilient controversies in twentieth-century anthropology, one that was to constitute something of a shibboleth for proponents of relativism – what, after all, could be more injurious to the alleged universality of causal concepts than heterodoxy in regard to the efficient cause of human life itself? (to which others would respond that the very question was evidence of relativist ethnographers being taken in by their informants’ own ideological dogmas). From an external perspective, however, both epistemologically and politically, the curious ethnogenetics of Spencer and Gillen’s...
Arunta pointed as much to anthropology’s evolutionist past as it did to its relativist future. In Hegelian terms, as we shall see, it represents an ingestion of evolutionist anthropology, a dense summation of the historical determinations that had combined to produce the paradigm. Through a reconstruction of its deeper genealogy, therefore, we can move towards a relativization of relativism.

This is not merely playing with words, doubling up on the relativist’s own game. Rather, through recovering the conditions that produced Spencer and Gillen’s announcement as an ethnographic event, we can map out key relationships between anthropological theory and colonial power. These relationships are at once both local and global. By stressing the former at the expense of the latter, relativism has disguised the systematicity of colonial domination – in universalizing particularity, it has hidden its own. To counter this effect, we can return relativism to the geopolitical conditions that have nurtured and sustained it. We can begin this by retrieving what relativism suppresses: the homogeneous, the global, the unitary – which is to say, pre-eminently, the economic.

Relativism has often been criticized for privileging the non-economic, the idealational, the superstructural. This is particularly true of those versions of the literary turn that reduce social processes to a set of textual strategies. These two features of relativism – the particularism and the idealism – converge as commonly obscuring the unified economics of global imperialism. In what follows, therefore, I intend to situate one of relativism’s most celebrated examples in this wider context.

For convenience, the allegation that Spencer and Gillen’s Arunta did not realize that conception was the result of sexual intercourse will be termed ‘nescience’. This term not only reflects fin de siècle usage. It also has the advantage of emphasizing how diametrically the Arunta were discursively counterposed to the scientific ideals with which their ethnographers identified. This polarity provides an initial convergence of ethnography and imperialism since it replicates the opposing territorial interests at stake in the context of settler colonialism. Thus we can consider whether or not it was merely coincidental that the one bifurcation should obtain in both the scientific and the geopolitical domains. In this regard, the career of Baldwin Spencer is exemplary since, as well as marking a high point in evolutionist ethnography, Spencer was centrally involved in constructing a policy with which Australian governments sought to eliminate the Aboriginal race.

His and Gillen’s ethnographies attained such international renown that, in Australia, Spencer acquired a virtually unrivalled authority on Aboriginal matters. In 1911, after Australia’s Northern Territory had been placed under the jurisdiction of the federal government, Spencer was appointed Chief Protector of Aborigines, with a brief to report on the Aboriginal situation in the Territory (Mulvaneey and Calaby 1985: 264–304). In his report, Spencer distinguished between ‘half-castes’ and ‘quadroons’ who may be regarded as belonging to the white population. The procedures that he recommended for dealing with ‘half-castes’ were simple but effective:

No half-caste children should be allowed to remain in any native camp, but they should all be withdrawn and placed on stations. So far as is practicable, this plan is now being adopted. In some cases, when the child is very young, it must of necessity be accompanied by its mother, but in other cases, even though it may seem cruel to separate the mother and child, it is better to do so, when the mother is living, as is usually the case, in a native camp. (Spencer 1913: 21)

Spencer made this recommendation at a time when the abduction of Aboriginal children was becoming central to the state-forming strategy of the fledgling Commonwealth of Australia, a national amalgam of previously distinct colonies that had only been constituted in 1901. Such abductions, which were carried out until the late 1960s, were a key element in what came to be known as the assimilation policy. This policy, which, as will be seen, was standardized for all the states of mainland Australia in 1937, sought to eliminate Aborigines through the eugenic expedient of ‘breeding them white’.

As it relates to Baldwin Spencer, therefore, the question of the relationship between ethnography and imperialism becomes the question of whether it was merely by chance that the same man should have come to promulgate both nescience and the assimilation policy. I contend that the coincidence was neither random nor particular to Spencer. Rather, it was symptomatic of a determinate logic that was common to the ostensibly separate projects of ethnography and ethnicity. To substantiate this, I shall first establish the two genealogies involved – an epistemological series running through evolutionary anthropology and a politico-economic series involving the establishment and consolidation of Australian settler-colonialism – and then show that nescience precipitated the cultural logic that bound these two genealogies together. This cultural logic rendered ethnography organic to the settler-colonial project in a manner at once more subtle and more thoroughgoing than can be expressed by ‘handmaiden of colonialism’-style analyses in which anthropology figures as inertly determined by colonizing imperatives. In the 1990s, there can hardly be any remaining need to demonstrate that evolutionist ethnography, presupposing as it did the extreme inferiority of colonized indigenes, legitimated their oppression. Though undoubtedly true, this is both too obvious and too general to repay proving again. If we remain satisfied with catch-all descriptive congruencies such as ‘epistemic violence’, we miss the specific connections whereby hegemony is realized in local practice. This can be appreciated once the relevant contexts have been fleshed out. Thus we turn first to the epistemological series, situating nescience in the context of evolutionary-anthropological theory.

The most explicit such critique is probably Maurice Bloch’s (1977) ‘ritual discourse’, although W. E. H. Stanner’s (1967) critique of Durkheim is analogous. More recent examples include David Lloyd’s (1990) ‘aesthetic culture’ and Jeremy Beckert’s (1988) ‘homo religious’, with which my own homo superorganicus (below) is clearly cognate.

13 The proof of Arunta primitiveness, the only proof, has been their nescience of the facts of generation (Lang 1908b: 193).

14 ‘The proof of Arunta primitiveness, the only proof, has been their nescience of the facts of generation’ (Lang 1908b: 193).

15 I use this term in this context because, as opposed to genocide, which suggests physical extermination, ethnocide is directed against collective identity, which does not preclude leaving individuals alive (cf. Clastres 1988). See also Orlando Patterson’s ‘social death’, in particular the element of natal alienation (Patterson 1982: 5). For a general discussion of the concept and definitions of ethnocide (which is Raphael Lemkin’s term) see Lefferts 1988.
aberration. 'Closer observation', contended Bachofen (1967a: 70), 'must lead to a deeper view. We find not disorder but system. Not fancy but necessity'. Das Muttermach was devoted to chronicling the historical unfolding of this necessity. The chaste vision that Bachofen detailed was not, however, reflected in the consensus that came to dominate evolutionary anthropology. Rather, for McLenan, Morgan, Lubbock, Wilken and others, 'mother-right' consisted in a matrilineality that resulted from a generalized uncertainty of paternity along precisely the lines suggested by Millar (whom no one acknowledged), which situation was held to be the evolutionary precursor to a patrilineal patriarchy more consistently termed 'father-right'.

The initial statement of the evolutionary-anthropoligical version of mother-right came in John Ferguson McLenan's (1865) Primitive Marriage. Though McLenan later conceded to Bachofen the distinction of first proposing a stage of descent through women, he maintained that his theory had been conceived independently of Bachofen's, which he deemed a descriptive and inferior account on the grounds that Bachofen had merely seen the fact that kinship was anciently traced through women only but not why it was the fact (McLenan 1876: 323). McLenan's own theory explicitly focused on kinship (understood as perceptions of consanguinity) to which the scenario that Millar had envisaged was central:

The connection between these two things - uncertain paternity and kinship through females only, seems so necessary - that of cause and effect - that we may confidently infer the one where we find the other. (McLenan 1865: 161)

Citing contemporary Welsh and Bedouin marriage rites in which mock captures of the bride were enacted by men of the groom's party, McLenan's theory of the origins of kinship linked marriage with violence with all the system of that catch-phrase of a later anthropology, 'we marry our enemies'. He invented the terms 'endogamy' and 'exogamy' to denote, respectively, in-marrying and out-marrying tribes (McLenan 1865: 48-49), out-marrying operating by virtue of a rule which declares the union of persons of the same blood to be incest. Though according a fundamental role in the origin of society to the avoidance of incest, McLenan's theory is notable for the lengths to which he went to exclude psychological or instinctual motives from the emergence of incest regulations. His developmental engine was a Malthusian one, 'the early struggle for food and security', whereby warring hordes engaged in a constant and ruthless battle for survival against other groups and surrounding nature. It followed from this that, whereas men would have been at a premium, the relative weakness of women would have rendered them unwelcome additions to a horde (or 'stock'), so that female infanticide would have arisen as a general practice. The ensuing shortage of women meant that they had to be captured from outside and shared around. This ecologically-motivated need to obtain women from other

17 E.g., Morgan 1866: 1871; 1877, Lubbock 1870; 1885, Wilken 1884: 1923, Tylor 1865: 1889; 1896.

18 In The Descent of Man, Darwin (1871: i, 132-5) took up McLenan's theory, approvingly citing infanticide as a mechanism for the selection of human varieties that would be favourable enough to secure humanity's break with the lower primates.

The Circumstantial and the Cognitive

Nescience conjoined two originary narratives in evolutionary anthropology - a social-organizational one deriving matrilineal kinship systems from primal promiscuity and a cognitive or ideographic one which attributed beliefs in supernatural impregnation to the doctrine of animism. The former, which came to be known as 'mother-right', was of considerable cultural depth, dating back at least as far as classical antiquity. For our purposes, however, it is sufficient to locate it in John Millar's (1771) Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society, which, being published as Cook returned to England after his first landing in Australia (at the time New Holland), made no reference to the land or its inhabitants and shows no sign of being influenced by earlier reports or speculations about them. Thus it is safe to take Millar's narrative as a European - or, at least, wholly non-Indigenous - invention. Indeed, as might be gathered from his title, Millar's discussion was directed towards his own society, his purpose being a liberal argument for the emancipation of slaves, women and Scottish miners. Where he could, Millar supplemented his conjectural history of human society with travellers' reports culled from sources ranging from classical antiquity through to his own day. Though contending that society developed out of despotically patriarchal families in which women were chattels without rights, he also noted that Herodotus and other classical writers had suggested an even more barbarous arrangement, which could 'in some countries' have preceded any form of marriage whatsoever:

To a people in this situation it will appear that children have much more connection with their mother than with their father. If a woman has no notion of attachment and fidelity to any particular person, if notwithstanding her occasional intercourse with different individuals she continues to live by herself, or with her own relations, the child which she has born, and which she maintains under her own inspection, is regarded as a member of her own family, and the father, who lives at a distance, has no opportunity of establishing an authority over it. In short, the same ideas which obtain among us, with regards to bastards, will, in those primitive times, be extended to all, or the greater part of the children produced in the country. (Millar 1771: 30)

In the next century, as a result of the writings of McLenan and Morgan, this scenario of primitive promiscuity precluding the possibility of nominating fathers came to dominate evolutionary anthropology, constituting the central premise behind the theory of mother-right. Moreover, Australian natives were held to be living embodiments of the theory.

Though predicated on amorality and confusion, mother-right acquired its name from a book in which the female principle figured as sublimely virtuous. In his famous and convoluted (1861) treatise on the subject, Johann Jakob Bachofen took issue with Herodotus' dismissal of the Lycean custom of reckoning descent through the mother as an isolated non-Hellenic

16 There is much to be said in this regard - though I do not say it here - about Western and Christian discourses on Judaic matrilineity, especially in the context of the campaign for Jewish emancipation, which did not occur in Britain until 1871.
groups formed the basis of McLennan's theory of the development of exogamous tribes:

If it can be shown, firstly, that exogamous tribes exist or have existed; and secondly, that in rude times the relations of separate tribes are uniformly, or almost uniformly, hostile, we have found a set of circumstances in which men could get wives only by capturing them. (McLennan 1865: 54)

Citing George Grey's journal of exploration, McLennan could confidently assume that Australian savages would be recognized as fitting the bill:

That the practice of getting wives by capture de facto prevails among the natives of Australia, is a fact familiar to most readers... The reader may imagine the extent to which, among the myriad hordes of savages, the women are being knocked about, and the men accustomed to associate the acquisition of a wife with acts of violence and rape. (McLennan 1865: 73; 77-8)

Thus evolutionary anthropology had been capitalizing on the possibilities of ignorance of paternity long before Spencer and Gillen were to record nescience in the 1890s. But there are considerable differences between the ignorance entailed in mother-right and the ignorance that Spencer and Gillen were to allege. In particular, McLennan's tracable paternity did not involve the cognitive deficiency that was to be inherent in the failure to appreciate the principle of insemination as Spencer and Gillen were to report it. In fact, quite the reverse was the case - as Millar's reference to bastards in his own eighteenth-century Scottish society indicates - the whole point of an uncertainty arising from promiscuity was that it was only too consistent with civilized logic. Indeed, the critical bite of McLennan's theory came precisely from its uncomfortable bearing on the sexual double standard which maintained a thriving Victorian underlife of prostitution and illegitimacy (it was a wise Victorian who knew his own father). At least in so far as the British evolutionists are concerned, the theory of mother-right had immediate links to domestic sexual politics. Groped by a post-Malthusian obsession with population growth, the British state, notably by means of a series of Contagious Diseases Acts that were introduced in the 1860's, intervened cruelly and repeatedly into the sexuality (ostensibly the fertility) of, in the main, working-class women (Harrison and Mott 1980, Jeffrey 1985, Lynd 1945, McHugh 1980, Smith 1971, Weeks 1981). So far as more respectable women were concerned, a long-running battle over women's rights (or lack of them) to hereditary marital property was to result in the landmark Married Women's Property Act of 1882, which curtailed the automatic passing of a daughter's property to her husband on marriage (Holcombe 1963). In cases of divorce, women did not have rights to their children. All in all, it requires little interpretive licence to recognize the distinctive themes of the mother-right narrative - primal promiscuity, uncertain paternity, the subordination of maternal descent, the primacy of patriarchal property, and so on - as refractions of Victorian sexual politics (cf. Coward 1983). In the case of

mother-right, the motive for ignorance of paternity was, clearly, circumstantial confusion rather than cognitive deficiency.

Yet we cannot simply say that there were two different kinds of nescience: one circumstantial and merely concerned with fathers' identities, the other cognitive and concerned with the principle of insemination itself. This is because, as was to be made explicit by Spencer and Gillen amongst others, the full nescience of the principle of insemination could also result from circumstantial causes. Assuming the kind of sexual chaos that sprang so readily to the repressed Victorian imagination, a chaos in which young girls and old women were alike involved, sexual intercourse would be a constant rather than a variable. As a result, there would be no call to correlate it either with the onset of menstruation or with the menopause - on the basis of the available evidence, sex need have no more to do with conception than had eating or sleeping.

For clarity, therefore, we need to distinguish two kinds of nescience and two kinds of motive, noting that the distinctions are not coterminous. So far as the motives are concerned, the distinction between cognitive and circumstantial seems straightforward enough. The two types of nescience can be distinguished as nescience of agent (paternity uncertain) and nescience of principle (insemination unknown). Nescience of agent, the inability to nominate fathers because of a surfeit of candidates, was exclusively circumstantial. As Shouten, in 1757, seems to have been the first to state in so many words (which later authorities never tired of repeating), 'maternity is a matter of fact; paternity one of inference'. Since nescience of agent was a discourse on immorality, it was taken for granted that Aborigines would be prime exemplars, an expectation that their ethnographers did not disappoint. Thus, as Lorimer Fison, one of the founding fathers of Australian ethnography, famously put it in relation to the Kamaroi of New South Wales:

When a woman is married to a thousand miles of husbands, then paternity must be, to say the least of it, somewhat doubtful. (Fison and Howitt 1880: 73)

Though nescience of principle, the failure to link intercourse to impregnation, could spring from the same promiscuous factors as those underlying mother-right, it added a cognitive narrative which was separate from the moral discourse underlying the circumstantial version. This cognitive narrative was Edward Burnett Tyler's theory of animism, which Spencer and Gillen's announcement empirically confirmed.

Tyler, a Quaker and a rationalist, was a prominent advocate of the principle of the psychic unity of mankind. This principle sustained the side of Reform in relation to two recurrent nineteenth-century issues. Despite the 1833 banning of slavery throughout the British empire, the issue of slavery had periodically resurfaced (especially, of course, in the USA) in the controversy between monogenists and polygenists, since different Adams could have generated offspring of an order of difference profound enough to warrant

20 Were it not so confusing, the two forms could be more precisely expressed as being nescience of 'principal' and of 'principle' respectively.

21 Given the connotations that attach to the term 'psychic' today, this principle is probably better conceived as 'psychological' or 'cognitive' unity.
separate standards of moral treatment. In this regard, the psychic unity of mankind represented a comprehensive negation of polygenesis (cf. Stocking 1987: 159, 270). Secondly, where the question of progress versus degeneration was concerned, the same principle made it impossible for the whole of mankind to have started out on an equal footing from which an unequal distribution of innate endowment must have caused some races to progress while others fell into decay (Stocking 1987: 161).

In keeping with his emphasis on psychic unity, Tylor was an intellectualist, seeking cognitive explanations for social phenomena. Hence he attributed a whole range of obsolescent customs to a savage mental propensity that he termed ‘the association of ideas’. This distinguished his theories from those of McLennan, who, as noted, went to considerable lengths to avoid resorting to psychological or instinctual explanations for social phenomena. To this extent, therefore, the difference between cognitive and circumstantial expresses the difference between Tylor and McLennan. Thus the two forms of nescience encompassed perhaps the deepest anthropological dichotomy of all – that between the concrete mechanics of social organization (the umbilical binding of matrilineal stocks) and the genetics of abstract ideas (spirit conception). Tylor’s theory of animism exemplifies his intellectualism. In common with other evolutionary anthropologists, Tylor aspired for his new discipline to solve the great human questions, in particular those concerning the origins of religion and abstract thought. It is important to recognize that this goal was common. For, though McLennan and his successors – in particular, William Robertson Smith (1889) and Emile Durkheim (1912) – attempted to start their explanations from morphological or social-organizational bases, their explainanda were no less ideational than Tylor’s. This meant that critical moments arose in their theories at points where they tried to switch from social morphology to ideational levels of explanation. By contrast, Tylor’s problem was to disguise the fact that, though he was offering an account of the genesis of ideas, there was nothing social about it.

To achieve his end, Tylor simply substituted universal for social, attributing abstract concepts to reflections on the experience of dreaming that could theoretically occur to anyone (or, at least, to any savage). He coined the term ‘animism’ for a theory which, once elaborated in his epochal (1871) Primitive Culture, exercised enormous influence on late nine teenth-century thought. For evolutionary anthropologists, metaphysics defined humanity, in that the problem of the origins of human consciousness was conceived as a requirement to account for the way in which people had first come to populate the material world with invisible entities residing in or behind concrete objects. Divinities being abstractions par excellence, theology and epistemology coincided around this problem, whose principal props were fetishism and totemism. In this context, Tylor’s theory of animism proposed that the idea of a spiritual double connected to bodies or to other physical objects initially arose from the memory of moving about in dreams and trances despite others’ reports that one’s body had remained still. Herbert Spencer’s (1870: 537) ‘ghost theory’, which was also influential, displaced the same idea from sleeping bodies to dead ones. Either way, it was the initial duality that mattered; animism having accounted for the attribution of vitality to one inert body, it could readily be generalized to others. Once conceived, abstract vitalities, whether as invisible spirits residing in things or as the ghosts of dead ancestors, were invested with powers. This was the beginning of religion.

In keeping with the conventional evolutionist confabulation of phylogeny and ontogeny, or species and individual developments, Tylor (1871: i, 431) dubbed animism a childish doctrine, ‘the infant philosophy of mankind’, which was no different to the nursery belief that sticks or toys were alive. Twenty years on, this was precisely the basis on which the English solicitor and folklorist Edwin Sydney Hartland commenced his series of investigations into ‘the savage philosophy of things’, a faithfully Tylorean concept which he described as:

that infantine state of mind which regards not only our fellow men and women, but all objects animate and inanimate around us, as instinct with a consciousness, a personality akin to our own. (Hartland 1891: 25)

The savage philosophy of things proceeded from three premises: animism, transformationism and witchcraft (understood as the power to cause transformations) (1891: 334–7). Hartland’s 1891 book ended with the observation that, if there were a human state more primitive than the savagery whose mental echoes were preserved in fairy tales, then work would have to be done to ascertain it. The questions that such work would raise would be avowedly cognitive, taking the investigator ‘across the border of folklore into pure psychology’ (1891: 352).

On the basis of the savage philosophy of things, people could enter into transactions with animals and objects in the surrounding world on just the same terms as they could with other humans. This possibility would even extend to marriage, ‘wherein one party may be human and the other an animal of a different species, or even a tree or plant’ (1891: 27). Since it was possible to marry such an entity, one could also have one for an ancestor. This was Hartland’s explanation for totemism, which he understood as the worship of mythic ancestors of material or animal form. A direct offshoot of this construction, appearing two years later, was Hartland’s notion of ‘substitution’, by which he meant the doctrine that a person’s vital principle could be extended to an object, so that action on the object would have a corresponding effect upon the person (he instanced [1893: 466] the ‘learned chirurgeon’ of three centuries earlier anointing and dressing the weapon rather than the wound which it had caused). This version of action at a distance lent itself to the derived idea that, rather than a person’s life merely spreading to an object by sympathy or contagion, it might be transferred in toto for storage or safe-keeping in the object. From this, two years later, sprang the theory of external souls, or ‘life-tokens’ (Hartland 1895), which were material entities whose fate was tied to a person’s life, as with Dorian Gray’s
picture or the knife that went rusty when someone died. (There was, of
course, an immediate link between these ideas and the bond which, in
Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, tied the mistletoe in the sacred grove at Nemi to the
life of its distractedly vigilant priestly guardian.)

The possibility in animism that interested Hartland was thus the idea of
a sharing or exchanging of vitality between people and things. Hence he
ascribed (1895: 53-4; 442) the origin of the concept of property to shared
identifications. He was interested in exchange since, if a person transferred
the whole of their life to an object, it followed that they would actually
become transformed into that object. His account of such a belief was pure
animism:

Starting from his personal consciousness, the savage attributes the like con-
sciousness to everything he sees or feels around him. And holding that outward
form is by no means of the essence of existence or of individuality, he looks upon
the transformation as an ordinary incident, happening to all men at death,
happening to many men and other creatures whosoever they will. (Hartland
1895: 441)

The idea that death could furnish a hinge for transformation amplified an
equivalence between transformation and transmigration that Hartland had
established in a book published the previous year (1894: 226-7). Trans-
migration, understood as a transformation mediated by death, thus derived
from the same elaboration of animism as the life-token. For our purposes,
the crucial feature of transmigration is that, since it provides for people’s
pre-existing, it only involves a short step to pregnancy without procreation.
(Its constitutes, as it were, procreation). Nevertheless, even if individual lives
do not need to be started, there still has to be some conduit whereby they
transmigrate or transform themselves into the foetus in the womb. This
calls Hartland’s understanding of totemism. Transactions between
women and non-human entities would furnish the requisite mechanism.
This was precisely the form that Hartland’s thinking of the previous year
had taken.24

Correlating stories of transformations, a collection of magical fertility
practices and a body of myths involving supernatural births (or births
resulting from metaphysical visitations upon women), Hartland had argued
(1894: v) that the concept of life that underlay them was a sacramental one
(the rhetorical implications for Christianity were overt). Though conceding
(1894: 180) that magical practices such as the carrying of fertility dolls, as
well as the superstitions justifying them, often augmented rather than
replaced natural processes, Hartland had asserted that the parthenogenetic
explanation preceded the natural one. He had claimed that myths involving
supernatural births were to be found universally distributed, and that, rather
than survivals of an era in which the bizarre or bestial unions recounted
might actually have been practised, these myths were evidence of an
evolutionary stage in which the principle of insemination had not been
recognized. In other words, in what must surely count as an ethnographic
23 Needless to state, Acrisius’ precaution presupposes physiological awareness on his part. The point is the
content, rather than the persuasiveness, of Hartland’s theory.

24 As in the case of other implications of his theory, the witty McLennan had anticipated the circumstantial
possibility of nescience of principle, only he had not developed it: ‘blood-lore through fathers could not find
a place in a system of kinship, unless circumstances usually allowed of some degree of certainty as to who
the father of a child was, or of certainty as to the father’s blood. A system of relationship through fathers could
only be formed – as we have seen that a system of relationships through mothers would be formed – after a
good deal of reflection upon the fact of paternity. And fathers must usually be known before men will think
of relationship through fathers – indeed, before the idea of a father could be formed’ (1865: 158). For all his
perspicacity, though, McLennan could not think beyond men thinking of relationship through fathers. Indeed,
for all the ingenuity – and it was considerable – that two generations of evolutionists devoted to this issue,
not one of them ever entertained the prospect of the polyandrous mothers sharing a secret smile across the
inexhaustible throng of unwitting suitors.

equivalent of the discovery of Pluto, barely two years before Spencer and
Gillen were to announce the Arunta’s nescience, Hartland had theorized its
prehistoric occurrence in the course of a conjectural reconstruction that led
from animism to transmigration. The actual ‘prophecy’ (retrodict?) came
about as follows:

Hartland (1894: 1-3) took the legend of Perseus as his key myth. After an
oracle pronounced that he would be killed by the son of his daughter Danae,
Acrisius locked her up in a brass tower to ensure her celibacy, a plan which
Jupiter frustrated by visiting Danae in a shower of gold, after which she
was born to Perseus.23 Hartland’s statement of this myth’s significance juxtaposes
different theses which it brings together so clearly that one could draw
lines through the text to divide them up. Thus our two types of nescience
are distinguished, with the first reflecting circumstantial causes and the
second implying these as well as an ‘attitude of mind’.24 Furthermore, though
this attitude of mind is suggested by antiquarian evidence, Hartland makes
an ethnographic reference to native Australians at the very point where he
hypothesizes nescience of principle. In this regard, it is, however, noteworthy
that mother-right was seen as a surviving trace of a long-superseded
nescience, and that he does not suggest that contemporary native Australians
might still persist in such ignorance:

The researches of the last five-and-twenty years have established that among many
savage races the father was held to be no relation to his children. Even where he
exercised, as among the native Australians, despotically power over his wife and
children, the latter were held to be his rather as owner than as begetter; and the
ownership of both wife and children passed at his death to his brothers, while at
the same time the relationships of the children were reckoned exclusively with
their mother’s kin. This system of relationships, known scientifically as Mother-
right, traces whereof are almost everywhere found, can only have sprung either
from a kind of promiscuity wherein the true father could not have been
ascertained, or from an imperfect recognition of the great natural fact
of fatherhood. Both causes, perhaps, played their part. But at least we may say that
the attitude of mind which favours the practices and beliefs we have been
discussing is one which would be consistent, and consistent alone, with the
imperfect recognition of the father. And it is unquestionable that the superstitions,
one rooted, would be likely to survive long after paternity had become an
accepted fact, and tenacious of their existence, would seek new grounds of
justification. (Hartland 1894: 180-1)
SETTLER COLONIALISM AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Such a restrained formulation may not seem much like prophecy. At this stage, however, it is not prophecy. It only becomes so retrospectively, in the light of Spencer and Gillen’s Australian ethnography. The clearest symptom of this process is Hartland’s tensing. In 1894, the illustrative allusion to Australia notwithstanding, his savagery is empirically a thing of the past (“the father was held to be no relation to his children”). In this regard, it contrasts strikingly with the robustly ethnographic presentism (and, it might be noted, increasingly cognitive emphasis) of his remarks once Spencer and Gillen’s verification of his hypothesis had been established as the realization of an anthropological prediction:

Ignorance of the real cause of birth, it might be thought … would not long survive the habitual commerce of men and women and the continual reproduction of the species. It would not, in our stage of civilisation and with our social regulations … [but] the savage who has not been thus fertilised is still by comparison undeveloped … His attention, not habitually directed to the problems of the universe, is easily tired. His knowledge is severely limited; his range of ideas is small. Credulous as a child, he is put off from the solution of the merely speculative question by a tale which chimes with his previous ideas, though it may transcend his actual experience. Hence many a deduction, many an induction, to us plain and obvious, has been retarded, or never reached at all; he is still a savage. (Hartland 1909: 255; 256)

Between Hartland’s two statements, Spencer and Gillen’s discovery had transformed his genteel literary speculation into a scientific prediction experimentally confirmed in the ethnographic laboratory. That the initial postulate had been framed in the context of a different milieu is suggested by his having perceived it necessary to paraphrase the concept which was ‘known scientifically as Mother-right’. Thus it is revealing to retrace his first steps from letters to science.

Hartland’s initial reaction to Spencer and Gillen’s confirmation of his suggestion was one of bemusement. In fact, in his review of their 1899 book, which established Arunta nescience as a cause célébre, he made no mention of The Legend of Perseus, confining nescience to a few understated remarks manifestly overshadowed by his preceding discussion of bilateral kinship:

Besides all this we are given to understand [citing the pages] that nescience is not understood. It is distinctly held not to be the direct result of conjugal relations, but, if I rightly apprehend the author’s [sic – he clearly meant Spencer’s] meaning, because some spirit from the Alcherings [‘dream-times’] seizes an opportunity of reincarnation, or is induced by magical practices to seek such an opportunity. (Hartland 1899: 236)

It was not until the following year, in the course of his presidential address to the Folk-Lore Society, that Hartland acknowledged the substantiation of his conjecture. Even here, however, he displayed a distinct hesitance to accept the idea that his suggestion should have met with such literal confirmation:

Some years ago I ventured to suggest that certain archaic beliefs and practices found almost all over the world were consistent only with, and must have arisen from, imperfect recognition of fatherhood. I hardly expected, however, that a people would be found still existing in that hypothetical condition of ignorance. Yet, if we may trust the evidence before us, it is precisely the condition of the Arunta. They hold the cause of birth to be simply the desire of some Arunta of earlier days to be reincarnated. (Hartland 1900: 65)

In both passages, Hartland seems unsure of Spencer and Gillen’s evidence. This is understandable, since their 1899 testimony fell appreciably short of unambiguous clarity. On the same page (Spencer and Gillen 1899: 265) as the statement that children were not the direct result of intercourse, they had suggested that intercourse could prepare the way for spirit children. Hartland even cited this page in relation to a statement by Frazer that the Arunta believed that immaculate conception was the sole cause of human birth, adding the remark ‘But it looks as though they “had their suspicions”’ (Hartland 1900: 66, n.1).

As we have seen, though, Hartland was to come round. In so doing, however, he only endorsed a construction that others were putting on the sequence of events. Thus, when Arnold van Gennep (1906b: LXVII) chided Andrew Lang for not conceding to Frazer that Arunta nescience was neither isolated nor aberrant, his question was rhetorical: ‘Doesn’t he know Mr. Sydney Hartland’s study of the topic of supernatural births?’ Van Gennep’s question is central to the development of nescience, since it emphasizes the generality implicit in Hartland’s hypothesis. As an evolutionary stage through which all must pass, nescience was unlikely to remain an idiosyncrasy of the Arunta, but could be expected to surface wherever there were people whose status was deemed commensurable.

This implication had been anticipated from the very first response that Spencer and Gillen’s book had received, from the influential pen of Frazer, who had been in consultation with Spencer through all the stages of its preparation. Unlike Hartland himself, Frazer unhesitatingly proclaimed a direct link between the Arunta and The Legend of Perseus. The way in which this link was expressed is illuminating, since it presaged a subsequent chain. For Frazer, the Arunta did not merely exemplify an extraordinary belief; they were ‘the first’ – a term which not only suggested that Spencer and Gillen had won a race, but assumed that others would follow them in:

Students of folk-lore have long been familiar with notions of this sort occurring in the stories of the birth of miraculous personages [here he cites The Legend of Perseus], but this is the first case on record of a tribe who believe in immaculate conception as the sole cause of the birth of every human being who comes into the world. (Frazer 1899: 649)

The issue is not the accuracy of Frazer’s claim (Spencer and Gillen had merely reported that the Arunta believed themselves to be thus conceived) but the pre-existence of a theoretical space which drew Spencer and Gillen’s
report into its implicational economy. Thus anthropological theory has been discussed before the account of Spencer and Gillen's fieldwork because that is the order which best reflects the empirical chronology. This body of theory was there before Spencer and Gillen. Whilst he was still in England, Spencer had worked with Tylor on the reinstallation of the Pitt Rivers anthropological museum (Mulvaney and Calaby 1985: 59–61). While preparing for his fieldwork, he had been in correspondence with both Tylor and Frazer (Marett and Penniman 1932). In establishing a theoretical context before proceeding to the ethnography, therefore, we are repeating Spencer’s own historical experience. More generally, this procedure illuminates the projection onto Aborigines of European fantasies about Europe's own prehistory, fantasies whose origins were demonstrably independent of empirical Indigenous data.

Walter Baldwin Spencer, who had studied anatomy under Maudsley at Oxford (where Tylor had recruited him for the museological work), had gone to Australia to take up the foundation chair in biology at the University of Melbourne. In 1894, the year of The Legend of Perseus, he went to Central Australia as the biologist on a scientific expedition financed and led by an Adelaide businessman, William Horn. The expedition's anthropologist was Edward Charles Stirling, professor of medicine at the University of Adelaide and director of the South Australian Museum (Mulvaney 1996). In Alice Springs, which was the end of the overland telegraph line, Spencer met Frank (Francis James) Gillen, postmaster and Sub-Protection of Aborigines, who had local knowledge and established relations with Indigenous people in the area. The ethnographic possibilities offered by the combination of Gillen's local knowledge and Spencer's scientific competence appealed to both men, eventually leading to the publication of their two great works (Spencer and Gillen 1899, 1904). The first of these, The Native Tribes of Central Australia, sprang from the Engwara ceremonial ground, whilst the second, The Northern Tribes of Central Australia, resulted from an expedition which they mounted from Alice Springs up to the Gulf of Carnarvon in 1901–02.

Following nescience through Spencer and Gillen's publications, it is asserted with a steadily growing confidence that strikingly mirrors the development of Hartland's responses to their discovery.

The report of the Horn Expedition, edited by Spencer, appeared in 1896. In the course of Stirling's anthropological contribution, nescience of principle was to all intents and purposes asserted, only by means of some negative phrasing which, whilst unequivocally cognitive, was almost perversely inconclusive. In response to the suggestion that the operation of urethral subincision might be intended as a contraceptive measure, Stirling objected that such an explanation would imply

a knowledge of physiological processes, which, it appears to me, we are not justified in attributing to people of the mental status of Australians any more than we should attribute circumcision to the knowledge of the hygienic or pathological disadvantage of a long prepuce. (Stirling 1896: 34)

25 For copious details concerning Spencer and his partnership with Gillen, see Mulvaney and Calaby's (1985) biography.

After the Horn Expedition, Spencer and Gillen's partnership was consolidated in fieldwork undertaken together from 1896 to 1897, which resulted in their classic 1899 book. In this book, the Arunta's nescience was explicitly asserted in the course of their own denial that subincision was an attempt at contraception:

Time after time we have questioned them on this point, and always received the reply that the child was not the direct result of intercourse, that it may come without this, which merely, as it were, prepares the mother for the reception and birth also of an already-formed spirit child who inhabits one of the local totem centres. Time after time we have questioned them on this point, and always received the reply that the child was not the direct result of intercourse. (Spencer and Gillen 1899: 265)

Early in the new century, Spencer and Gillen mounted the expedition from Arunta country up to the shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria from which, in 1904, their second major ethnography resulted. The 1904 version of nescience was stronger than the previous one on two counts. Firstly, the idea that conception could occur without intercourse even taking place was strengthened by the omission of any suggestion that intercourse might constitute some kind of preparation for childbirth. Secondly, the belief was now alleged of all natives living between Alice Springs and the Gulf of Carpentaria:

the natives, one and all in these tribes, believe that the child is the direct result of the entrance into the mother of an ancestral spirit individual. They have no idea of procreation as being directly associated with sexual intercourse, and firmly believe that children can be born without this taking place... In every one of the tribes dealt with by us there is fundamentally the same belief with regard to conception as we have previously described in connection with the Arunta. Every individual is regarded as the reincarnation of an ancestor. (Spencer and Gillen 1904: 330, 606)

In view of this level of certainty, it is instructive to observe how, in an article published while their 1899 work was still in preparation, nescience had been alleged with much more circumspection. Indeed, following a year after Stirling's Horn Expedition report, Spencer's prose is only marginally more affirmative:

When a woman conceives it is supposed that it is one of such a group of spirits who goes inside her and thus it naturally follows, granting the premises firmly believed in by the natives, that the totem of the child is determined solely by the spot at which the mother conceived, or, what is the same thing, believes that she conceived, the child. (Spencer and Gillen 1897a: 25)

Like Hartland, therefore, Spencer and Gillen grew in confidence. In Hartland's case, there are all sorts of possible reasons. He may just not have been convinced (the ethnography left plenty of room for doubt); he may not have liked Frazer's appropriation of the topic; or he might have resisted the
idea that his antiquarian achievement of penetrating further back in time than history or philology could go might still be emulated by ethnography. Such possibilities do not, however, apply to Spencer and Gillen. Indeed, it is hard to see why an open-and-shut question like nescience should be expressed with differing degrees of equivocation. In this regard, it is difficult to ignore the presence, over in Queensland, of Walter Roth, who had been a co-member with Spencer of Maudsley’s Oxford anatomy group (Mulvaney and Calaby 1985: plate 11). As is well known, in 1903 (in other words, a year before Spencer and Gillen’s second book), Roth was to allege nescience of principle of the Tully River blacks (Roth 1903, cf. Leach 1969). More intriguingly, however, back in 1897 – the year after Stirling’s Horn Expedition report and the year in which Spencer’s first circumspet formation appeared – Roth too had made a statement on the relationship between urethral operations and contraception, one whose not-quite-conclusiveness was, if anything, even more tantalizing than Stirling’s:

In this connection it is interesting to note that even the possibility of taking artificial measures to prevent fertilisation, &c. (I am not speaking of abortion,) is apparently beyond their comprehension: thus I have reports from station-managers who assure me that only with great difficulty could their ‘boys’ be made to understand, if ever they did, the object of spaying cattle. (Roth 1897: 179)

All in all, it is as if Spencer and Gillen were engaged with Roth in a race to fulfill Hartland’s prophecy. In their 1899 book, Spencer and Gillen (1899: ix, 265) noted the correspondence between Roth’s 1897 data and theirs. Roth’s fifth bulletin of 1903 was then somewhat less equivocal about Tully River beliefs than Spencer and Gillen had been about the Arunta’s, whereupon their 1904 book presented the strongest statement of all (cf. Spencer and Gillen 1904: 145, n.). It was at this juncture that Hartland himself seems to have given up resisting the prophetic momentum (although in a way which avoided subscription to the Frazer camp), observing of Spencer and Gillen’s 1904 book that:

Its special value is that it supplies in great measure the links which unite the beliefs and practices of the Arunta with those described by Mr. Walter Roth. (Hartland 1904: 474)

But if there was a race, why did Roth (and, for that matter, Stirling) hold back? Why did they not come out and proclaim their discovery of a people who did not connect copulation to pregnancy? Whilst it is, of course, hard to say, it is worth noting that neither Stirling nor Roth, both ethnologists by training, would have had any particular call to be aware of Hartland’s book until the reaction to Spencer and Gillen’s revelations gave it a wider than folkloric significance.26 Spencer, on the other hand, was in constant contact with Frazer, who was not only well aware of Hartland’s conjecture but, like Hartland, was endeavouring to devise a theory that could account for the data of totemism. Frazer had already pinned his hopes on two separate

26 Thus an earlier claim about the Arunta (Aranda) escaped such attention, presumably because it was made outside British scientific discourse – in German, in a relatively obscure periodical, by one of the first of the German Lutheran missionaries to the Aranda at Hermannsburg Mission – who reported the Aranda to believe that God gave them children: ‘Die Kinder, sagen sie, schenkt Alljawa (Gott)’ (Kempe 1883: 55). theories of totemism, neither of which had worked. Nescience of principle was to provide him with a third and final explanation, ‘conceptional totemism’, according to which totemism originated spontaneously as an animistic account of pregnancy. The satisfaction that this explanation afforded Frazer (1905: 457–8) was palpable: ‘after years of sounding, our plummets seem to touch bottom at last’.

With Spencer and Gillen’s Arunta nescience, the displacement from a Eurocentric antiquarianism to (settler-)colonial ethnography was consummated in two major respects. Cognitively, it gave animism an empirical foundation (cf. Stocking 1987: 236–7) which, being independent of dreaming, did not derive its plausibility from individualist introspection. Thus savage ignorance no longer needed to be something that we all shared. As a result (and secondly), the moral implications could also be categorically externalized in a way that had been precluded by the nescience of agent that had sustained mother-right. As a cognitive condition, nescience no longer be of a piece with Millar’s Scottish bastards or the contradictions of Victorian sexual practice. Though potentially continuous with mother-right so far as the circumstantial narrative was concerned, Spencer and Gillen’s Arunta nescience of principle actually produced a thoroughlygoing cognitive separation.

So far as the epistemological series is concerned, then, it is clear that nescience was anticipated to the point of overdetermination by the antecedent context of evolutionary-anthropological theory.27 Thus it remains to situate Spencer and Gillen’s text in the context of Australian settler-colonization. Here, there is no doubt about the empirical complicity whereby ethnography and politics converged – Spencer was chosen to be Protector of Aborigines and commissioned to prepare his report on account of his ethnographic credentials. On its own, however, this convergence does not explain very much. To appreciate its systemic nature, we need to explore the cultural logic whereby Spencer’s combination of the two roles symptomatized rather than brought about their commonality. Thus we turn now to the political series, situating Spencer’s text in the context of Australian state-formation.

Nation and Miscegenation

In its broad context, Australian settler-(or creole-)colonization is part of the Western European project of global colonization that stems from the fifteenth

27 I do not understand why Morphy (1997) should be at such pains to question Spencer’s manifest and consistent subscription to evolutionism, especially when it involves him (Morphy) in such palpable inconsistencies. Consider, for instance, the following consecutive sentences: Spencer and Gillen have been labelled too easily as evolutionary theorists when evolutionism informed little of their arguments... (section heading) ... Spencer and Gillen were both strongly influenced by Darwinian evolutionary theory (Morphy 1997: 50). Morphy’s intention is to argue that there is more to Spencer and Gillen’s ethnography than evolutionary theory. In particular, their empirical findings impacted significantly on evolutionary theory, whilst their dual role as theoreticians-and-fieldworkers anticipated the participant observance of twentieth-century professional anthropology. As this chapter and Chapter 5 should make clear, however, neither of these considerations are inconsistent with Spencer’s deep and abiding commitment to evolutionism, a commitment which stands out with particular clarity when his writings of the 1890s are put alongside those of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. Morphy’s difficulty would seem to stem from his willingness to take Spencer at his own word in preference to analyzing his texts in depth, a preference that appears to be at odds with Morphy’s approach to Aboriginal utterances.
century. Thus it is consistent that the first detachment of British invaders, made up of convicts and their custodians under the command of Captain Arthur Phillip, should have been commissioned in the wake of the American colonies’ attainment of independence from Britain, a development which, amongst other things, closed off an outlet for convict shipment. When the First Fleet first set foot on Gamaragal land, on 26 January 1788, their enterprise was already horizoned with precedents, conventions and expectations. Moreover, the new land was by no means completely new, having already been mapped and named by Cook and Banks, whose reports had suggested New Holland (Terra Australis, The Great South Land or the Antipodes to earlier navigators and speculators) as a suitable place for settlement (Carter 1987, Frost 1990). Though instructed to engage in friendly commerce with the natives, Phillips’ party very soon resorted to shooting them (Stanner 1977), establishing a pattern that was to be repeated across the face of the continent over the next century and a half. For, regardless of instructions to the contrary, the invaders entertained few practical doubts as to their entitlement to settle the land, an entitlement whereby indigenous self-defence was itself seen as invasion.

Phillips’ instructions (and, for that matter, the Mabo judgement\(^{28}\)) notwithstanding, Australian settler-colonization was phrased in terms of the doctrine of *terra nullius* rather than of any acknowledgement of native title. As it had been elaborated by eighteenth-century European jurists such as Wolff, Vattel, Pufendorf and Blackstone, land had to become property for rights of ownership to apply to it. Property entailed a twofold criterion, one material or technical and the other political or regulative. In the first instance, the land should have been improved — which is to say, rendered a more efficient provider of human subsistence than the natural state — through labour being mixed with it. Practically, this meant that the land should have been cultivated, irrigated, built on and enclosed. Secondly, a system of legitimate sanctions had to operate whereby those who had improved the land should have the right to unfettered enjoyment of the fruits of their labour — or, in other words, to private property in it. Practically, this meant centralized governance, formal laws, policing and, again, enclosure (or acknowledged boundaries). Unless these two criteria were met, the inhabitants were not a society but legally transparent entities, so that, for ownership purposes, the land was no one’s (a bourgeois elaboration of the Roman *vacuum domicilium*). A third, pragmatic criterion, which was generally derived from the first two, reflected the growth of urbanizing Europe’s concern over population densities. It held that, if an area was being so inefficiently used that it was only supporting a fraction of the population that it otherwise might, then more efficient societies were entitled to export their surplus population to realize its potential (the convicts being a paradigm case).\(^{29}\)

Though ostensibly codifying indigenous rights (or the absence of them), *terra nullius* was primarily a systematization of the mutual rights and obligations of rival European powers. It specified the conditions under which one such power could lay claim to a foreign territory as against all the others. Its obvious relation to bourgeois society is confirmed by the fact that it only began to take hold from the eighteenth century on, displacing the earlier formula for laying claim to a colony, which (asserted for longest by feudal and Catholic Spain) had been based on the Pope’s authority over islands (Frost 1990: 65).

As progressively encoded into Australian law,\(^{30}\) *terra nullius* was, of course, a rationalization rather than a motive for colonial invasion. The motive was greed — specifically, greed for land. The specification is necessary because it expresses the particular nature of settler-colonialism. As observed in the introduction, settler-colonialism consists in a negative articulation between invaders and the land.\(^{31}\) The cultural logic which is organic to a negative articulation is one of elimination. In its purest form, as in the case of the Guanches (indigenous Canary Islanders), Tainos, Caribs, etc., the logic of elimination strives to replace indigenous society with that imported by the colonizers. In local Australian practice, this cultural logic was actualized by virtue of the fact that the economic use to which the colonized land was principally turned was that of pastoral settlement, whose requirement for territory was inherently exclusive. This is because the introduced cattle and sheep competed with indigenous fauna for subsistence, consuming the tubers, shoots and seeds whereby the indigenous fauna reproduced itself and rapidly reducing waterholes to mud. In a relatively short time, little subsistence remained available to Indigenous humans apart from the introduced fauna whose protection was basic to the pastoral project (McGrath 1987: 1–23, Reynolds 1981: 128–30). Hence pastoral settlement became a zero-sum conflict. Thus the pattern of violence established by the First Fleet was neither gratuitous nor random but systemic to settler-colonization.

Since frontiers moved across Australia from coastal beachheads variously established over the century following the landing of the First Fleet, it is not possible to date the development of Australian settler-colonization as a whole. Thus it is convenient to organize its establishment and consolidation into a typology of phases, a heuristic which is enabled by the consistency of the general pattern.\(^{32}\) The initial phase, in which the land was first seized, is principally characterized by indigenous mortality, attributable to four main (and mutually supportive) agencies — homicide, sexual abuse, disease and

\(^{28}\) For analyses and discussions of the primary formulations of *terra nullius* (Blackstone 1783, Vattel 1758, Wolff 1764, Grotius 1609; 1625, Locke 1690, Pufendorf 1688) see, e.g., Frost 1990, Hulme 1993, Reynolds 1992.

\(^{30}\) As the British Privy Council declared in the case of Cooper v. Stuart (1889: 14. Appeal Cases, 286), "there is a great difference between the case of a colony acquired by conquest or cession, in which case there is an established system of law, and that of a colony which consisted of a tract of territory practically unoccupied, without settled inhabitants or settled law, at the time it was peacefully annexed to the British dominions. The colony of New South Wales belongs to the latter class."

\(^{31}\) A significance of the negative articulation is that, since it provides for the elimination of Indigenous groups, Indigenous/invasive relations cannot be specified in terms of class (cf. Hartwig 1972), i.e., in terms of groups’ respective relations to the means of production. This is because, in the rigorous sense in which such relations are specified, Indigenous groups are outside the mode (forces plus relations) of production (which is to say, ideally they do not exist). This is not to say that class relations do not empirically occur (since some Indigenous people survived the initial invasions, their labour naturally became exploitable). It is rather the case that, in a strict analytical/definitional sense (i.e., in terms of the settler-colonial social formation), settler exploitation of Indigenous labour represents a contradiction, rather than an inherent component, of the system.
starvation. Though conditioned by ecological factors, this phase was very short. As the settler anthropologist and Victorian government official Edward Curr put it,

In the first place the meeting of the Aboriginal tribes of Australia and the White pioneer, results as a rule in war, which lasts from six months to ten years, according to the nature of the country, the amount of settlement which takes place in a neighbourhood, and the proclivities of the individuals concerned. When several squatters settle in proximity, and the country they occupy is easy of access and without fastnesses to which the Blacks can retreat, the period of warfare is usually short and the bloodshed not excessive. On the other hand, in districts which are not easily traversed on horseback, in which the Whites are few in number and food is procurable by the Blacks in fastnesses, the term is usually prolonged and the slaughter more considerable ...

The tribe, being threatened with war by the White stranger, if it attempts to get food in its own country, and with the same consequences if it intrudes on the lands of a neighbouring tribe, finds itself reduced to make choice of certain death from starvation and probable death from the rifle, and naturally chooses the latter. (Curr 1886: 100–101; 103-4)

In addition to the differences in firepower, Indigenous resistance to settler-colonization, though universally offered (Broome 1982, Lippmann 1981, McGrath 1995, Miller 1985, Morris 1989, Read 1988, Reynolds 1981), was hampered by a number of factors. Chief among these are the ravages of introduced diseases – smallpox, syphilis, typhoid, whooping cough, diphtheria, tuberculosis, dysentery, influenza and the rest – against which they had not developed immunities (Butlin 1983, Campbell 1983: 198, cf. Crosby 1986); the activities of native police or troopers recruited and armed by settler authorities to put down their tribal enemies (Rosser 1991, cf. Fels 1988); and other intracommunity conflicts resulting from refugee crises occasioned by the invasion (Rowley 1978: 36–7). In the event, the standard pattern was one of decimated but largely pacified survivors improvising a variety of livelihoods in the zones of the now-established settler society, which generally regarded them with distaste. The varied subsistence which tribal territory had previously provided was now replaced by the ubiquitous ration of tea, sugar and ‘white man’s flour’, which thus condensed and potently signified the historical process of expropriation. To this day, flour laced with strychnine still stands for genocide in Australian parlance. In the second phase, the

32 For alternative typologies for this process, see Beckett 1989, Broome 1982, Drakakis-Smith 1984, Read 1988.
34 For as it constitutes an apology for the invasion, the claim that more Aborigines died at the hands of other Aborigines than at the bands of whites (Blauwey 1975: 108–9; Nance 1981) betrays a depressing paucity of historical reflection. It should surely be unnecessary to point out that the invasion could not but have produced refugee crises in regions where resources were already subjected to unprecedented strains. There are no prima facie grounds for imagining that the consequences should have differed greatly from ones which have characterized comparable situations in Europe. The causal chain required to attribute such consequences to the invasion is hardly too long to tax a normal historical intelligence.

survivors were generally gathered at fixed locations, either by the lure of rations or by coercive measures, a procedure which, whilst no longer directly homicidal, continued the effect, consistent with the logic of elimination, of vacating Indigenous country and rendering it available for pastoral settlement. In keeping with both evolutionist premises and the tangible evidence of their decimation, these people’s sojourn on the missions, stations and reservations where they had been gathered was seen as a temporary expedient, since they were a dying race (the evolutionist rationale for this being that, unshackled by selection as they were, they would be entirely unfit to survive in the presence of their immeasurably distant future). Though couched in philanthropic rhetoric which contrasted strongly with the homicidal sentiments of the first phase (the missionary role was held out as ‘smoothing the dying pillow’), the premise of the dying race was no less consistent with the logic of elimination.

During both these phases, the colonists exploited native labour. The example of the Native Mounted Police, who were used extensively in Queensland and the Port Phillip District (later to become Victoria) has already been cited. Beyond this, though, settler-colonization relied upon Indigenous labour at every stage and in every site of its development. Indigenous people guided, interpreted for and protected explorers. They cut bark, built fences, dug, planted, maintained, shepherded, stock-rode, mined, pearl-dived, sealed and performed every conceivable settler-colonial task except governance. On cattle stations, they typically kept house and provided sexual services, whereby pastoralists ‘bred their own labour’ (Bleakley 1961: 317, McGrath 1987: 68–94, Huggins 1988). Thus it is not the case that, in practice, settler-colonization only eliminated the natives. It is rather the case that the exploitation of native labour was subordinate to the primary project of territorial acquisition. Settler-colonists wanted to stay. In the main, they did not send their children back to British schools or retire ‘home’ before old age could spoil the illusion of their superhumanity. National independence did not entail their departure. Thus even though, being established too late and too far north for convicts to be available, the northern Australian cattle industry relied very heavily indeed on Aboriginal labour, it is an exception that does not alter the rule. It merely slowed down its operation somewhat – for instance, no sooner had equal wages for Aborigines been introduced in the 1960s and 1970s than Aboriginal labour was dispensed with and relegated to container-settlements at a revealingly rapid rate (Berndt and Berndt 1987, Drakakis-Smith 1984: 100, Rowe 1993a).

This notwithstanding, one element in the foregoing stands out as particularly contrary to the logic of elimination. White men’s sexual exploitation of Indigenous women produced offspring who, growing up (as they almost invariably did) with their maternal kin, could be accounted native rather than settler. Moreover, far from dying out, this section of the

native population threatened to expand exponentially. Crucially, in other words, the sexual element of the invasion contravened the logic of elimination (to put it another way, the behaviour of individual colonizers was bound to negate the interest of colonization). In other colonial situations, where native (as opposed to imported) labour was at a premium, people with combined ancestry could be accounted settler-become-native (as in the case of Latin American mestizaje [Bartra 1992, Canney and Pagden 1987, Mörner 1967, 1970]) or something separate from either native or settler (as in Colette Guillaumin’s sharp specification [1988: 27] of South African ‘coloreds’ as a ‘class formed by people belonging in fact to one and the other group [which] is declared to belong to neither one nor the other but to itself’). In Australia, by contrast, as the logic of elimination would indicate, the only category whose expansion was tolerable was the settler one. In other words – and in stark distinction to situations in which a metropolitan society depicts itself as being contaminated from within, as in the case of Nazi Germany – the answer to the problem of ‘miscegenation’ could only be absorption into the settler category.37

As the nineteenth century progressed, the romance of the dying race steadily gave way to the spectre of ‘the half-caste menace’. Towards the end of the century, a movement for the federation of the separate Australian colonies gathered momentum. As envisaged by its predominantly entrepreneurial promoters, federation would dismantle barriers hindering free trade between the separate Australian colonies, a development that would prepare the ground for separate nationhood (with dominion status). At the turn of the twentieth century, this goal was achieved. The Commonwealth of Australia was constituted by an act of the British parliament that took effect from the first of January 1901. At this moment, ‘Australia’ became a national as well as a geographic entity. This was not a natural convergence. Despite Australia’s insular geography, New Zealand was at one stage to be included in the federation, whilst at another, Western Australia was not. Nationalist rhetoric aside, therefore, before 1901 ‘Australia’ was a natural rather than a cultural category. Hence Edward Curti’s above-cited book, The Australian Race published in 1886, was about Aborigines, who were part of the natural features of the land mass on which the several colonial polities were constituted. Accordingly, at a single stroke (the last one of 1900) settlers became, and Aborigines ceased to be, Australians – an inversion which was formalized by Aboriginal natives’ exclusion from the terms of the new constitution. As if in anticipation of structuralism, therefore, the ‘half-caste menace’ straddled the boundary between nature and culture, threatening the basis on which the citizenship and geography of the new imperialist nation-state were predicated.

The official response to ‘the half-caste menace’ was the assimilation policy, whereby people of mixed descent were not to be accounted Aboriginal – which is to say, they were to be accounted settler. As administratively implemented, this meant the separation of people of ‘mixed race’ from their natal kin. This strategy constitutes the third phase of Australian settler-colonization. The first instance of such legislation occurred in Spencer’s colony, Victoria, in 1886 (the year of Curti’s book), when an act was passed which provided for the expulsion of ‘half-castes’ from Aboriginal reserves (Attwood 1989: 81–103, Christie 1979: 178–204, Critchett 1980, Wilkinson 1987). As federation approached, other colonies began to follow suit. This process was effectively completed by the outbreak of World War One, the conflict which, in nationalist mythology, constitutes the national baptism.

For Indigenous people, however, the baptism of blood depended on whether or not their particular portion of it was ‘full’. As the new nation and the twentieth century unfolded, official policy progressively turned from a negative strategy of expelling ‘half-castes’ from reserves (which, so far as it worked at all, only produced ‘fringe-camps’ and a rural landscape punctuated by destitute Indigenous people shuffling between the margins of more or less hostile country towns) to a positive strategy whereby the products of ‘miscegenation’ were taken from their kin and incorporated into the settler domain.38 This strategy was applied to children, whose natal links could more readily be obliterated. Assuming continued ‘miscegenation’, the policy of leaving behind a ‘full-blood’ population as the only officially recognized Aboriginal category would ensure that this category became an ever-dwindling one. In other words, the legislation was intended to reinstate the dying of the dying race – or, as it was put by J.A. Carrolds, secretary of the Australian Department of the Interior, at the national conference which formulated a version of assimilationism for uniform implementation across all states:

It would be desirable for us to deal first with the people of mixed blood. Ultimately, if history is repeated, the full bloods will become half-castes. (Commonwealth of Australia 1937: 21)

In its ideological genealogy, the assimilation policy combined historical discourses with both metropolitan and colonial applications. As the eighteenth century drew to a close and the invasion of Australia was set in motion, offering a new outlet for relieving some of the pressing excess of urban poor now that North America was closed off, few if any British officials had seen anything to fear from savage sexuality. Indeed, it had often been conceived in romantic, even Edenic, terms. On the other hand, the sexuality of the metropolitan dispossessed was rapidly becoming the overriding social concern of the day (Weeks 1981: 19–20). This, after all, was what was responsible for producing the excess – one which, even after furnishing the energy to pacify the antipodean wilds, would still pose a constant threat to domestic stability. In 1798, this concern had been momentously encapsulated in Thomas Malthus’ An Essay on the Principle of Population.39 A conservative, reacting against the French Revolution, Malthus had sought to expose the fearful consequences to which progress logically tended. The twin motors of his

37 Here and elsewhere (e.g. Wolfe 1994), I stress the specificity of constructions of ‘miscegenation’ to the structural particularities of the different colonial relationships that produce them. Inclusive discourses (assimilation, etc.) harmonize with the eliminatory character of settler-colonial social formations once they have reached a point at which the latter are multiply outnumbered (which need not take long at all). In this respect, my analysis differs from the general stress on exclusion that is a feature of Ann Stoler’s stimulating analyses (Stoler 1989; 1995: 50–52; 133; 1997).

Hobbesian vision was hunger and sex. Hunger (and, consequently, merciless terminal struggle) was the natural result of finite resources being outrivaled by a population explosion which, once enabled by scientific advances, was produced by unbridled sexual activity. Throughout the following century, the British state - which, on the basis of Malthusian logic, had become preoccupied with birth statistics - intervened increasingly (and mainly by way of women) in the sexuality and family organization of the urban poor (Weeks 1981: 19-20, Coward 1983: 50-2). As is well known, Malthus' logic of struggle also inspired (independently, it seems) the thinking of Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace, whose theories, as glossed and (at least, in Darwin and Wallace's case) teleologized, were combined to make up the rough Lamarckian amalgam that came to be known as Social Darwinism.⁴⁰

In such roundabout ways, Aborigines and the white proletariat (or, more particularly, *lumpenproletariat*) both became subject to Malthusian discourse, with Aborigines ironically coming to replicate the very threat that had previously sent whites to Australia. With a new state to build, while Australia came to realize that it had on its hands not so much a dying race as, immeasurably more threatening, an exploding population which, though not black, was neither white nor dying out. Once within the boundaries of colonial settlement, the contradiction in white men's sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women became acute. This was especially the case in the southeastern centre of white settlement, where Aborigines were seen not as sources of labour but, like proletarians in the strict sense, as producers of nothing but offspring. Thus did the fledgling Australian state come to find itself with a dilemma comparable to that which had confronted the fledgling industrial power of a hundred or so years earlier.

The assimilation policy, a eugenic realpolitik that would have been worthy of Malthus himself, continued the logic of elimination by rendering Aborigines the pure term of a descending opposition whereby 'part-aboriginal' came to mean 'non-aboriginal'. Hence it was not merely an expression of some unspecified racial prejudice but continued the cultural logic subverting Australian settler-colonization in a manner consistent with the homicidal activities of the first phase. That this continuity obtains in cultural logic does not mean it is merely an analytical abstraction. On the contrary, the overlap between frontier homicide and the social death attending 'misegregation' was constant. Indeed, Gillen's nemesis, mounted constable Willshire, did not scruple to publicize his homicidal exploits in the outback. In one passage, for instance, he clarified an account of a massacre that he had directed with the material qualification that '[i]t's no use mincing matters - the Martin-Henry carbines at this critical moment were talking English in the silent majesty of those great eternal rocks' (Willshire 1896: 41).

⁴⁰ Eight years later, this concern was buttressed with more explicit policy implications, Malthus entitling the third (1800) edition An Essay on the Principle of Population: Or, a view of its past and present effects on human happiness with an inquiry into our prospects respecting the future removal or mitigation of the evils which it occasions. For the eighteenth-century background, see Wheban 1991.

Yet Willshire saw no tension between this account and a comparison that he had ventured a few pages earlier, in which the 'full-blood' had been sentimentally accommodated:

1 do not object to them; they are the pure aborigine, who are gradually going to extinction. But I certainly do object to the mongrel half-caste, who inherits only the vices of civilization. If it is a male he is born for the gallows or to be shot; if a female, she becomes a wanton devoid of shame, and despair she knows not. (Willshire 1896: 35)

The context in which Spencer recommended to the Commonwealth government that 'half-caste children ... should all be withdrawn and placed on stations' was, in sum, one in which an emergent nation-state was implementing a post-frontier version of a cultural logic that was generic to settler-colonization. Spencer was neither the first nor the only official to recommend such measures.⁴¹ Rather, he was integral to a wider process that cannot be reduced to individual design. The policy that Spencer helped to construct stayed in place until 1967, when a national referendum overwhelmingly authorized the removal of the constitutional exclusions to which Aborigines had been subject (Attwood and Markus 1997). More recently, the Indigenous community organization Link-Up, established to reunite families that were officially broken up under the policy, estimated the number of people directly affected to remain in excess of 100,000 (Edwards and Read 1989: xvii).

Though assimilation and homicide conduced to a common settler-colonial end, they belong to different phases in the formation of a satellite state. As Benedict Anderson has influentially argued in his classic work *Imagined Communities* (1983), nationalism promulgates shared memories whereby historical happenstance becomes converted into collective destiny. In the Australian case, though there is no shortage of appropriate memories (pioneers, gold-diggers, bushrangers, etc.), the project of national memorization was above all one of forgetting the criminal legacy of genocidal theft upon which, in the absence of any form of treaty or mutual resolution, the settler-colonial state continued (as it continues) to be established.⁴² As nationalist ideology, in other words, the Australian state was proclaiming its own virgin birth. Thus the recalcitrant presence of Aborigines within the pores of the body politic embodied a decisive refutation of the legitimacy narrative whereby the national community (comprising the normative

⁴¹ Here again, Roth and Spencer were in accord, though, in this regard at least, there was no doubt as to Roth's priority, his recommendation having been made to the Western Australian Government in 1904 (Commonwealth of Australia 1997: 103-4). For the development and spread of the policy across all the Australian states and territories, see Commonwealth of Australia 1997: 25-146. For further background and analysis, see Chapter 6 below.

⁴² Thus the frankness in relation to the violence visited upon Indigenous peoples which characterized many nineteenth-century accounts of settlement was generally suppressed in twentieth-century Australian history-writing, resulting in the radical tradition of frontier historiography which is conventionally traced back - with some injustice to Bill Batty (1962: 168-84) - to the work of Charles Rowley in the late 1960s (Bishop 1982: 12). Outside history, however, even in the case of Aboriginal administrators, this was not always the case (see, e.g. Bleakley 1961: 68-75). Though Clive Turnbull's Black War is undoubtedly exceptional in this regard, the ideological consequences of a bounded narrative, the alleged fulfillment of the Van Diemen's Land (Tasmanian) genocide, are very different from historical evidence of incomplete genocides. The difference, of which present-day Palawas (Indigenous Tasmanians) must be only too well aware, is between the acknowledged existence and alleged absence of survivors whose descendents may one day be entitled to compensation. For background, see Ryan (1981) and Steve Thomas' film 'Black Man's House' (1992). On collective forgetting, see Freud (1917).
citizenship regulating non-Aborigines) was officially imagined. Throughout the twentieth century, the anxiety produced by this primal flaw in Australian nationhood has rendered Aborigines a legislative preoccupation to an extent entirely disproportionate to the demographic numbers involved.

In contrast to the invasive frontier strategy of outright homicide, assimilation was not simply more 'benign'. It also consummated the shift from satellite colony to nation-state. Constructing an autochthonous citizenship within finite national boundaries requires an ideological regime altogether different from one appropriate to the process of territorial expansion. Assimilation provided for Aborigines' civic invisibility, an ideological rather than a material elimination. Though the ultimate aim was 'breeding them white', the threat that Aborigines posed to the nation-state was not primarily physical (they could no longer materially impede the state's development of the continent's economic possibilities). Rather, Aborigines signified a differently grounded rival memory which contradicted the national narrative upon which a homogeneous citizenship was predicated. Assimilation sought to detach Aborigines from that memory. So long as they could be grafted onto the new history imagined by the nation-state, their physical characteristics were relatively unproblematic. In taking the children away, therefore, the Australian state sought to remove a primary obstacle to its own legitimation.

It remains, therefore, to characterize the logic of assimilationism in order to correlate it with that of evolutionary anthropology. Now that the respective genealogies of the two series have been shown to be distinct, this will enable us to focus on the cultural priorities that precipitated their mutuality.

As observed above, the essential feature of assimilationism, the principle that 'part-aboriginal' meant 'non-aboriginal', can be described as a descending opposition. This consists of a rigorous identity criterion whereby anything that does not embody all and only all the features of a given category is not merely outside that category but is, rather, positively categorized in opposition to it. Thus a single homogeneous category collectively demarcates the rest of the world. To put it more formally, appropriating Wittgenstein (1955: 73), 'The propositions "p" and "not p" have opposite senses, but to them corresponds one and the same reality'.

For our purposes, the salient characteristic of such a category is that it has no tolerance for contamination. Rather, contamination means conversion into the other (i.e. from the Australian state's point of view, into self), which is to say, contamination assimilates. To begin to relativize the virgin birth narrative, therefore, we will turn now to the question of how this logical structure of descending opposition also animated evolutionist ethnography. To this end, we can begin by noting that, for evidentiary purposes, 'miscegenation', the key term of the assimilation policy, was also central to nescience – if there was any doubt as to whether or not the Arunta really 'knew', the surest test would be the grounds on which they accounted for light-skinned babies. Thus we move now to the direct interface between the ethnographic and the political logics.

43 Thanks to Graeme Marshall for bringing this formulation to my attention.

Textual Symptoms

A key premise of evolutionary anthropology was the collapse of time and space whereby ethnography recapitulated prehistory – to leave Europe was to travel back in time.44 Hence the equivalence asserted between contemporary Aborigines and Europeans' primal forebears was not just a projection onto colonized people of European fantasies of self. It also furnished an evidentiary supplement. The nineteenth century was obsessed with origins. The prehistoric record, restricted as it was to material traces, was necessarily incomplete, a condition that could be alleviated by ethnography. In this there lies one of the possible motives for Hartland's resistance to Spencer and Gillen's realization of his evolutionary conjecture. Social evolutionists were methodological rivals, competing over whose theoretical vehicle could penetrate furthest back into prehistory. In Bachofen's case, the vehicle had been texts; in McLennan's, marriage rites; in Morgan's, kinship systems; in Tylor's, cultural survivals, and so on. Hartland's vehicle, suggesting a German inspiration, was folklore.

Methodologically, therefore, ethnography could represent a rival as well as a supplement. Hartland's personal motivation aside, this consideration underscores the symmetry between ethnography and prehistory. Both were originary narratives which strove to recover the primal, defined in terms of distance from the modern. For prehistory, this distance was constituted temporally within the space of Europe, its ethnographic reflex being present cultural and geographic distance beyond that space. The problem posed by prehistoric data was that they were materially fragmentary and semantically blunt. Conversely, the problem with ethnographic evidence was that, though theoretically complete, it decayed on contact, which instantaneously condensed all the time it had taken to reduce European prehistory to fragments. Hence all anthropoplogy was salvage anthropology (cf. Clifford 1987, Gruber 1970).45 Societies were significant not in themselves but for the light that they could shed on Europe's past. This varied to the extent that societies retained their original purity, which meant the extent to which they remained uncontacted. Thus ethnography was inherently contradictory, its data being jeopardized in the gathering. The irony of salvage anthropology is that the anthropologists' mere presence substantiates their sense of urgency. Spencer and Gillen's Arunta were already not there.

This much is, of course, not new. The point, however, is not the contradiction in the logic of evolutionist ethnography but its identity with the logic of assimilationism. As explained, the operative logic of assimilationism was a descending opposition that produced a radically unstable otherness that constantly converted into self. The crucial factor is the extreme instability of otherness, whereby 'part-aboriginal' automatically meant 'non-aboriginal'. This instability is the point at which the logic of

44 Anne McClintock (1995: 40) neatly quotes J.-M. Degrande to this effect: 'The philosophical traveller, sailing to the ends of the earth, is in fact travelling in time; he is exploring the past.' (cf. Fabian 1983: 25).
45 As Malinowski (1922: xx) was to put it, 'Ethnology is in the sadly ludicrous, not to say tragic position, that at the very moment when it begins to put its workshop in order, to forge its proper tools, to start ready for work on its appointed task, the material of its study melts away with hopeless rapidity.' (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1973)
assimilationism fused with that of evolutionist ethnography. For either
discourse, contact with Europeans despatialized savagery, displacing it out
of the present and into a different time-frame. In crossing the frontier (or
in being crossed over by the frontier) the native crossed into history. The
point is that this was not a spatial progression. It could be done whilst
standing still (as noted, merely by staying at home, the native gets in
the way of settler colonization). Rather than spatial, the movement into history
was a purely discursive progression, one that undid the evolutionist
conflation of time and space. Bereft of its spatial dimension, savagery was
left as a thing of the past. This spatio-temporal split produced a hyper-
susceptibility to contact that was asserted by evolutionist ethnography and
the Australian state alike. Both specified minimally inclusive, prehistoric
criteria for authentic Aboriginality, a coincidence which, given the prestige
attaching to scientific validation, powerfully naturalized assimilationism.
On this basis, it is not hard to see why evolutionist ethnography was so well
adapted for appropriation into Australian state discourse - or, accordingly,
why an ethnographer should be entrusted with recommending an
appropriate policy on Aborigines.

Thus, the logical symmetry between the two is clear, but it lacks
historical realization. Just as any number of geometries could construct spatial
relations as well as the Euclidean, so can various logical designations be
imposed on complex historical phenomena. How can we know that this
logical structure, common to ethnography and colonialism, is not simply an
analytical imposition of my own making but that it was active in the minds
of historical actors? To know this, we need an example or examples of its
entry into practice. In presenting Spencer and Gillen with an evidentiary
dilemma that precipitated the logical linkage between their ethnography and
settler-colonization, nescience prompted such an example. For, if the Arunta
failed to distinguish the paternity of 'half-caste' children, then Spencer and
Gillen would have proof positive of their extraordinary discovery. But the
cost of such proof would be high - if the Arunta were so uncontaminated
savages, how was it that the women were producing white men's offspring?
Thus Spencer and Gillen's dilemma was that the very 'miscegenation' that
could have corroborated nescience simultaneously undermined their
ethnography in relation to the general project of salvage ethnology, which
nescience otherwise pre-eminently validated (as observed, such astounding
ignorance was unparalleled savage). Hence categorical purity subverted
itself - as well it might in a situation where, whatever black men may have
said about paternity, white men were definitely denying it.

In response to this dilemma, Spencer adopted a textual strategy that
revealingly encodes the threat posed by 'miscegenation'. Cultural brokership,
the fruit of long-term local residence, was Gillen's contribution to the
partnership. As a result, to the ethnographic testament of Spencer's peerless
photography, they could add the qualification of being accepted as initiated

46 This aspect of my analysis is consistent with Johannes Fabian's (1983) 'denial of coevalsions'.
47 'In society where children are believed to have been reincarnated from totemic ancestors, there are no
parents in our sense of the term. The ancestor himself, or something that once belonged to him, has entered
the baby's of a married woman in order to be reborn as a human being; and there can be no question of
illegitimacy even when a half-caste infant is born to a full-blooded aboriginal couple' (T. Strehlow 1947: 21).

Arunta (though there was no mention of subincision). A further element in
their claim to have gained access to an otherwise intact savage world was
Gillen's linguistic expertise - their 1899 book was liberally strewn with
italicized Arunta words (Figure 1). Having thus established their credentials,
it was presumably immaterial that their subsequent expedition took them
outside Gillen's territory and, despite the offices of their Arunta assistants,
necessitated an exclusive reliance on pidgin. In any event, in their 1904 book,
Aboriginal discourse continued to be rendered in italicized Aboriginal
idioms.

Since, by 1911, Gillen was dead, Spencer undertook on his own the
expedition from which his recommendations to government resulted
(Mulvany and Calaby 1985: 265). In addition to the recommendations, he
produced another ethnography, of which italicized Aboriginal words
remained a feature. There was, however, a conspicuous exception, when the
bastard pidgin was not merely acknowledged but actually reproduced in a
manner which, had it appeared in other contexts, could only have under-
mined ethnographic credibility. The exceptional topic was 'miscegenation',
addressed in relation to nescience (which Spencer was asserting of a more
westerly portion of northern Australia than had been encompassed in his
and Gillen's earlier works). The difference between the newly fledged settler-
colonial administrator and the descriptive ethnographer of fifteen years
earlier is striking. For, where nescience was concerned, not only were
'miscegenation' and pidgin now acknowledged but, in a manner reminiscent
of Stirling's Horn Expedition report (a model that Spencer had not adopted
at the time) genetic hybridity acquired a linguistic correlate. But note how,
at the moment of contradiction, Spencer continues it by means of the crucial
'for some time' which lasts long enough 'for nescience, 'miscegenation' and
Spencer to coincide, but surely no longer:

There is one very interesting and suggestive point in this connection [nescience],
and that is the common explanation of the existence of half-castes given universally
by their mothers, speaking in pidgin English, viz., 'Too much me been eat em white
man's flour'. The chief difference that they recognised between their life before
and after they came into contact with white men was, not the fact that they had
intercourse with white men, instead of or side by side with, blacks, but that they
ate white flour and that this naturally affected the colour of their offspring. I have
seen old natives in Central Australia accept, without question, their wives' half-
caste children, making no difference whatever between them and the pure bred
ones. On the other hand, it is, of course, naturally, a belief that is one of the first to
become modified when the natives have been for some time in contact with white
men. (Spencer 1914: 25-6, my emphasis)

The loaded 'for some time' enables an ethnographic corridor to be inserted
into history, so that precontact culture might survive for long enough for
Spencer to salvage it. After this, despite the physical persistence of some of its
erstwhile inhabitants, the lost world only survives in his record, to which
subsequent information must conform if it is to be admissible. Thus the
with the idea of achieving a result which can be obtained otherwise without pain or trouble to themselves, and when also they know perfectly well that the desired result is not obtained by the performance of the operation. Added to this we have amongst the Arunta, Luritja, and Ilipirra tribes, and probably also amongst others such as the Warramunga, the idea firmly held that the child is not the direct result of intercourse, that it may come without this, which merely, as it were, prepares the mother for the reception and birth also of an already-formed spirit child who inhabits one of the local totem centres. Time after time we have questioned them on this point, and always received the reply that the child was not the direct result of intercourse; so that in these tribes, equally with those dealt with by Mr. Roth, the practice of sub-incision cannot be attributed to the desire to check procreation by this means.

In the south of the Arunta tribe the ceremonies again are somewhat different from these, both in the west and in the east. At Charlotte Waters, for example, the following is an account, in outline, of what takes place.

When the time arrives for a boy to be initiated, his Okilia talks to men who are Umbirna to the boy and arranges with two of them to carry out the first part of the proceedings. Towards evening the two Umbirna go to the boy, who has no idea of what has been arranged, and one of them takes hold of him while the other comes up from behind, carrying a special small white stone called aptera irkura, which he puts under the armpit of the boy. Then taking hold of him, one by each arm, they take him along with them to the camp of his mother and father. Here, by previous arrangement, the different members of the camp are assembled. All the men sit in a roughly semi-circular group, and together with them are women who stand in the relationship of Min and Uwinna to the boy. The latter, with an Umbirna man on either side of him, is then told to lie down in front of the group, and behind him again are gathered together the women who are Ungaraitska, Itia, Unawa and Umbilla to him. These women commence to dance to the singing of the men, and when this has gone on for some little time they retire

Figure 1. From Spencer and Gillen's The Native Tribes of Central Australia (1899)

The salvage paradigm makes Aboriginal society a textual construct that evaporates on contact.

Spencer's toll-tale resort to pidgin is a textual symptom of the primary linkage between his ethnography and the politics of assimilation, which consisted in their common production of a time-bound Aboriginality that was thereby maximally 'pure'. In this regard, the contradictory relationship between nescience and 'miscegenation' worked both ways, for, to maintain its purity, the Aboriginal category should have mirrored white society's aversion to 'half-castes' (hence the ideological significance of the reports of 'half-caste' children being killed at birth [Beckett 1988: 198, n.10]). Ignorance of paternity would have frustrated this occurrence. Thus not only could 'miscegenation' corroborate nescience but, reciprocally, nescience could sustain 'miscegenation'. Either way, therefore, both the salvage paradigm and assimilationism would be subverted.

As a symptom, Spencer's pidgin text is intrinsically empty. A form of historical paraphrase, it signifies extrinsically - its content is its context. This does not mean that nescience made Spencer's policy happen or even, more generally, that ethnography produced assimilationism. Clearly, assimilationism was produced by settler-colonialism. To specify a positive determination, therefore, it would be necessary to account for the settler-colonizing impulse, an agency which is conventionally derived from Western Christendom's fifteenth-century struggle to break Muslim trade-monopolies. But even this could only furnish a why, rather than a how. To reconstruct the weighted play of unintended consequences whereby global determinations unfold through definite relations that are, as Marx put it, indispensable and independent of people's will, we have to try to decipher the mediations and affinities around and through which prevailing tendencies are socially sustained. To suggest the complexity of the definite relations that brought together ethnography and Australian state-formation, it is important to retain the relative independence or self-containedness of the two series, which is why they have been recounted separately. But complexity is not indeterminacy. Thus, though it is not the case that the salvage paradigm was simply produced in the interests of genocide, it nonetheless is the case that, given the salvage paradigm, a scientific warrant was available for the social elimination of those whose expropriation was prerequisite to settler-colonialization. Thus it is necessary to distinguish between determinacy and necessity.

The qualified (or, perhaps, elective) determinacy of Spencer's dual role takes us back to the statement that it was not an individual coincidence. In so far as he was an anthropologist, Spencer's policy expressed sentiments that had been and would be shared by other anthropologists (e.g. the support for a nationwide implementation of the assimilation policy that was to be voiced half a century later by a subsequent doyen of Australian Aboriginal anthropology, A.P. Elkin [1947, cf. Wise 1985: 200; 202]). Nor was Spencer alone so far as the specific link to nescience was concerned. As we have seen, it has been asserted that the native women of Australia and Tasmania readily produce children to European men; the evidence, however, on this head has now been shown to be almost valueless. The half-castes are killed by the pure blacks' (Darwin 1871: 229).
Stirling's contribution to the Horn Expedition's report had contained an offhand remark that seemed to prefigure Spencer and Gillen's discovery. Eighteen years later, the correspondence was no less striking. Two months after Spencer's recommendations to the Australian government, Stirling was suggesting to a South Australian royal commission on Aborigines a plan which, whilst like Spencer's in acknowledging maternal bonding, was more developed in terms of specific implementation. Stirling was of the opinion that the more 'half-caste' children who could be absorbed into white families the better, proposing that the 'attractiveness of infancy' rendered it desirable to remove them early, since whites who were 'discinclined to take them when they were older' might nonetheless be prepared to take them young. By 'young', however, he meant two or three years, since, in the case of absolute infants,

then you would have the burden of them that all children are at such a young age.
When they are a couple of years of age they do not require so much attention and they are young enough to be attractive. (Stirling 1913: 125)

Thus the coincidence of nescience and assimilationism was not an individual idiosyncrasy on Spencer's part. On the other hand, nor was it simply a predictable reflex of, say, the doctrine of progress. Rather, its determinacy lay in a cultural logic that Australian settler-colonization (but not necessarily other forms of imperialism) shared with an ethnography which, as Frazer’s distinctive rhetoric was to illustrate, epitomized the salvage paradigm:

we may conjecture that in many other parts of the world a similar ignorance of physical paternity may have led to the institution of similar totemism, wherever that institution has been found. If that is so, we may say that the secret of the totem has been longest kept by the isolated tribes of Central Australia – till at last they revealed it to Spencer and Gillen, who snatched it from them just before that final decadence of the tribes set in, which otherwise would have rendered the revelation for ever impossible. (Frazer 1938: viii)

But the decadence had already set in, even back on the Horn Expedition. For that matter, so had the use of pidgin as a marker for 'miscegenation'. So, too, had the special context of white man's flour, densely signifying the expropriation on which Australia was founded. Here again, Stirling's contribution is revealing. For, in the following passage, it is hard not to see a model for his editor Spencer's packaging of ethnographic contradiction. Unlike Stirling, however, Spencer would not have admitted the damaging possibility of an Aboriginal husband being 'perfectly satisfied of his own paternity':

the little accident of the birth of a suspiciously light-coloured offspring of a full blooded lubra was thus explained by the mother in full belief that the statement of cause and effect was perfectly rational, and indeed the legitimate husband, also a full-blooded black, was perfectly satisfied of his own paternity – 'sposed lubra

eat 'um flour picaninny long a Pompey eat 'um too, then him jump up close up whitefellow; flour all day, like it, that make 'um'. Suppose the woman eats flour the child in the belly eats it too, and then the child is born closely resembling a white. (Stirling 1896: 129, n.)

As historical parapraxis, this pidgin becomes impossible to contemplate in isolation from the colonial context in which it is entangled, which it presupposes and reproduces. Though the context is epochal and global, the entanglement is quite particular. Beginning to trace this entanglement is beginning to relativize the text, which is – or should be – to precipitate history.

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We should look twice at anything taking place in the 1890s, when the whole world was beginning to shift. The age of capitalist imperialism was dawning, with trusts being formed in America and colonial monopolies emerging as the primary mode of contest between the European powers. Colonial nationalists were turning to militancy, trade unionism was burgeoning and Western women were on the march. Modernism was beginning to transform the arts. The horseless carriage, aeroplanes, moving pictures and quantum physics were being born. Freud was connecting dreams to wishes. Within anthropological writing, though evolutionism was at its zenith, cracks were developing that, with hindsight, would turn out to be fateful. In America, Boas was doing fieldwork and beginning to think relatively whilst, in France, Durkheim was extracting from the works of Comte, Herbert Spencer, Robertson Smith and others a concept of function that, before long, would revolutionize British anthropology. The Torres Strait Expedition was soon to set off from Cambridge. In Switzerland, Saussure was about to start lecturing. And much more besides.

To put it summarily, anthropology was poised before a paradigm shift that was itself part and parcel of the wholesale transformation that ushered in the twentieth century. Nescience gathers together – enables us to see – the complex intersections that bound anthropology's theoretical shift into this global transformation. In so far as the method is synecdochic, it recalls that of Mauss in The Gift – nescience is a strategic analytical site, a point of convergence for the multitude of narratives that were circulating in a discursive regime. Where Mauss' methodology was inherently synchronic, though, with 'all kinds of institutions' finding 'simultaneous expression' (1925: 1), I hope to show that nescience enables a double mediation, one that links sequential paradigms as well as coexistent discourses.

In the twentieth century, nescience was to become involved in very different anthropologies and very different politics. As noted, rather than clinching the Arunta's evolutionary abasement, it was to function as a test case in an ongoing debate over cultural relativism. Whatever the theoretical differences at stake, the participants in this debate have been united in
affirming a liberal respect for the natives whose heterodoxy has been at issue. In the political realm, the transformation has been even more striking, with the emergence of an official neoromanticism in Australian politics seeing science included among the grounds for Aboriginal land rights.

Neither the paradigm shift in anthropology nor the development of Australian government policy took place in a vacuum. Both participated in a global arena that was characterized by the emergence of new colonialisms and new modes of thought. We turn now to this wider arena. In the following chapter, the great paradigm shift that began to transform anthropology from around the beginning of the twentieth century will be situated in the widest of scientific and geopolitical contexts. Within this most general of contexts, we will then move, in the following three chapters, to fine-grained textual analyses of the development of anthropological theory. Finally, in Chapter 6, the analysis turns full-circle, coming back to Australia to chart the selective appropriation of certain aspects of that developing body of theory into official policies on Aborigines. First, though, the wider global context.

CHAPTER 2

Science, Colonialism and Anthropology

THE LOGIC OF A GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION

For our purposes, two significant paradigms ground to a halt in the course of the first quarter of the twentieth century. Geographically, Western colonialism stopped expanding whilst, epistemologically, Western anthropology turned away from sociocultural evolutionism. Given the intimacy of colonialism and anthropology, it is hardly possible that the two developments can be separated. Moreover, the new paradigms that came to the fore in the two domains bore a striking resemblance to each other. From the wholesale triumphalism of the expanding frontier, colonialism shifted to a diffident posture, offering indirect rule and fostering local autonomy. Analogously, the anthropological narrative shifted from an all-encompassing developmental hierarchy to a plurality of relativized and self-sustaining sociocultural isolates.

It is a 'post'-colonial truism that anthropology and colonialism have tightly interlacing histories. So far as I am aware, though, the epistemological grounds for their mutuality have not been specified—at least, not across time in a way that might keep track of the cultural logic within which the ties between anthropology and colonialism have developed as both colonial social formations and anthropology's theoretical formations have changed shape. This is distinct from the utilitarian approach that illustrates how anthropology came handy for colonial purposes. Rather, by identifying the logical and epistemological structures that commonly demarcated the two projects, we can begin to get behind the mere fact of their relationship to the conditions of its possibility. To the extent that we can achieve this, we can move beyond accidental affinities (the two happened both to coexist and to harmonize) towards a more positive explanatory relationship, but one that does not involve the crudeness of intentionality (the anthropologist as villain, as puppet, etc.).

As a first step in this direction, I shall try in this chapter to specify logical structures that span the full extent of anthropology's politicization—i.e. that characterize a discursive field whose limits extend from the practice of pure science on the one hand to that of colonial domination on the other. I shall try to do this across the two paradigm shifts that coincided in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Thus the analysis will have four main components, with science and colonialism each being divided into two modalities that roughly correspond to the two centuries. This will provide us with the wider