

RACE AND GENDER IN RECENT AUSTRALIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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This article gives the text of the Keynote Address presented by Professor Curthoys at the Second Interdisciplinary Gender Studies Conference held at the University of Newcastle in June 1995. The address drew on two other papers by Professor Curthoys: a review of the literature on Aboriginal labour history, written jointly with Clive Moore, for a special issue of *Labour History*, November 1995, and a review of *Creating a Nation*, published in *Labour History*, May 1995.

There is a growing body of writing within the fields of women's history, Aboriginal history and, most importantly, of writing which attempts to deal with the relationship between the two. The purpose of my paper today is to describe and discuss this changing historiographical context.

WOMEN'S HISTORY

First, the rise and rise of women's history. For many years now there has been great energy placed into researching the position of women in Australian history. The first stirrings of this began in 1970, and the first major publications in 1975 - Anne Summers' *Damned Whores and God's Police*, Beverley Kingston's *My Wife, My Daughter, and Poor Mary Ann*, Miriam Dixon's *The Real Matilda*, and Edna Ryan and Anne Conlon's *Gentle Invaders*. So feminist history is now a twenty-five year old project, with twenty years of products easily seen by the public at large. Indeed there is a conference in Melbourne next month called "Twenty Years After", to consider the importance of these works and the developments in Women's History since 1975. There have been many phases in the development of feminist histories, affected very much by larger and ongoing theoretical and methodological issues and contexts, such as social history, labour history, cultural history, and the effects of Marxist, structuralist and poststructuralist kinds of history.

Within the field of women's history, the history of women's work has been a major preoccupation, from Kingston's work on domestic work and Ryan and Conlon's on women's waged work. This was followed by the immensely detailed study of sexual divisions of labour in a whole host of postgraduate theses, finding publication in a special issue of *Labour History* in 1991, and some finding their way into book form, such as Raelene Frances's immense study of Victorian manufacturing workers, and Gail Reekie's detailed study of women workers in retail stores. Work is seen in all these studies as a major site for the production and reproduction of sexual difference, and as something that women do a lot of for little recognition or pay.

Since 1975, feminist history has become very much more theoretically aware. There has been a growing realisation that if we truly want to include women's experience then we don't simply keep our notions of history intact, we don't simply look for those women who behaved most like men, we change our criteria of significance altogether. In the study of work, we not only investigate women's under-recognised wage work, but also those forms of unpaid work that earlier historians had difficulty in recognising as work at all. In addition, there has been something of a shift from analysing femininity to masculinity, as our greater understanding of women's history has led us increasingly to reinterpret the history of men. Feminist history now aspires to examine both female and male identities, to investigate what both men and women

do, and to look for those places, which are everywhere, where gender matters. It is only very recently, though, that feminist history has aspired to take Aboriginal women's history, seriously. But more of that later.

ABORIGINAL HISTORY

The history of Aboriginal history has been quite different. The intense public debates of 1992 and 1993 around questions of native title ("Mabo"), the constitution, and the notion of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people marked something of a watershed for Australian historical work. Aboriginal issues were brought into the centre of national public consciousness, and forced even those who, as non-Aboriginal people, had thought themselves sympathetic with Aboriginal causes, to reassess their understanding of Australian politics and culture. To historians, these debates revealed the continuing strength of non-Aboriginal Australia's belief in stories of pioneering, settlement, and rightful occupation of the land, with many still holding the nineteenth century view that invasion and dispossession had been justified on the basis that Aboriginal people did not use the land productively. At the same time, the Mabo debate also revealed the growing strength of an alternative historical understanding emphasising the impossibility of justifying invasion in these or any other terms, and valuing rather than condemning Aboriginal societies.

The implications are important for labour historians. Too often the very existence of a history of Aboriginal labour is quite unknown, even to many Aboriginal people. Ruby Langford Ginibi, in *My Bundjalung People* (1994) for example, expresses surprise in learning for the first time about the extent to which Bundjalung people worked for white people on cattle stations. It is abundantly clear that historians have not done nearly enough to inform Australians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, of the history of Aboriginal labour. In a stirring essay, "Broken Silences: Labour History and Aboriginal Workers", Raelene Frances, Bruce Scates and Ann McGrath urge labour historians to take Aboriginal labour history more seriously; if they do not "labour history will remain, conceptually and analytically, trapped within that 'great Australian silence'" (207). The Aboriginal labour they are referring to is not that which was and is carried out entirely within Aboriginal communities, but rather that labour through which Aboriginal people have been brought into social relations beyond those communities. They point to the general neglect of that history by labour historians, most studies of Aboriginal experience as workers having developed within the field of race relations rather than labour history, and they contrast that neglect to the enthusiasm with which labour history has incorporated women's history and the history of gender. The difficulties in developing satisfactory histories of Aboriginal labour, they argue, lie in matters of historical method, speaking position, research ethics, and the institutional organisation of labour history itself. It is of the utmost importance, they remind us, that non-Aboriginal historians listen to and learn from Aboriginal historical and life-writing, and that we find ways of working with Aboriginal people when undertaking our historical research.

The first thing any history of Aboriginal labour has to do is come to terms with the popular racist assumption that Aboriginal people did and do not work. This assumption, whose continuing salience was so clearly revealed in the Mabo debate, is the single most important stumbling block to the development of a full and nuanced historical understanding of Aboriginal labour. Historians have approached this common belief in a number of ways. Some have agreed that Aboriginal people rarely worked for Europeans, not because they were culturally averse to work but because the colonisers, in the south and east especially, had and have little use or desire for their labour. In his path-breaking work, *The Destruction of*

Aboriginal Society (1970), Charles Rowley saw Australian colonisation as one which took "all the land and (often) only the land". The Australian situation is contrasted with those other colonial situations where cheap local labour was actively sought and bought; Aboriginal history is in contrast taken to be a history of dispossession, massacres, institutionalisation and segregation, but not for the most part a history of labour use and exploitation.

But increasingly, most people writing in the field of Aboriginal history, whether Aboriginal or not, do now acknowledge the historical existence of Aboriginal labour. Some stress that Aboriginal people did in fact work for non-Aboriginal employers under brutal and humiliating conditions, while others emphasise that Aboriginal people chose to work for Europeans intermittently, when and as they needed to. Whether brutal conditions or Aboriginal selectivity are noted, an Aboriginal labour history is at last emerging, and of course the differences in approach are as likely to be due to differing Aboriginal historical experiences according to time and place as to the presumptions of the historian. One important source of our increased historical knowledge is the growing body of work on the history of the north and west of the continent, where the use of Aboriginal labour was most clearly and recently evident. Another is a growing recognition that the use of Aboriginal labour in the south and east had always been very much more than historians had hitherto realised. In addition, the purview of labour history has broadened considerably to include studies of unemployment, casual labour, and paid and unpaid domestic labour, all of which enable and indeed require attention to Aboriginal people's experiences.

The slow birth of a distinctive field of study, Aboriginal labour history, is a little curious, for non-Aboriginal historians within labour history circles in Australia debated questions of race early and vigorously. Humphrey McQueen in *A New Britannia* (1970) emphasised the importance of racism in Australian history, introducing into labour history debates distinctively "New Left" concerns and posing them against the work of "Old Left" historians such as Ian Turner, Robin Gollan, Russel Ward, and Eric Fry, who had rarely dealt with questions of race and racism. For McQueen, however, the question of race was associated primarily with the desire for a White Australia and the imposition of a racially-based immigration policy, and only very slightly with Aboriginal history. As McQueen himself noted in his introduction to *A New Britannia*, he had been "far too peremptory in (his) treatment of the aborigines". How true that confession looks today. Chapters titled "Racists" and "Invaders" are not about Aboriginal-European relations as a modern reader would assume, but about fears of Asian immigration and of various forms of European, e.g. Russian, invasion.

McQueen was, however, just one of the young historians influenced by a renewed political concern with racism from the middle 1960s. There were many contexts for this concern, including the radicalising effects of opposition to Australian intervention in the Vietnam war, growing opposition to Apartheid in South Africa, and the influence of the Civil Rights movement in the U.S. Most significant of all was the political protest movement seeking equality and social justice for Aboriginal people, embodied in the mixed-membership Aboriginal Advancement Leagues of the 1950s and 1960s, the Freedom Ride of 1965, the Gurindji strike of 1966, the Referendum of 1967, and the Tent Embassy of 1972. In this rapidly changing political context, labour historians of the early seventies were keen to explore racism in Aboriginal as well as immigration policy, and the earliest work in labour history circles on Aboriginal labour began to emerge. When the journal *Labour History* decided to produce an edited collection on racism and the working class in Australia, the editors, Andrew Markus and I, included two articles, one by Markus himself, focussing on aspects of Aboriginal labour.

This and similar historical work opened up an important field for exploration, but in retrospect it is clear there were severe limitations to its ability to develop an innovative approach to Aboriginal labour history. The understanding of Aboriginal societies and history

by these non-Aboriginal historians was extremely limited. Labour historians had developed notions of class relationships which did help illuminate white Australian history, especially compared with the historical work that had gone before, but labour historians of both the Old Left and New Left varieties did not know whether or how to make these concepts illuminating for Aboriginal history. It was not that they didn't try. For a time, some labour historians attempted to develop a Marxist account of Aboriginal labour. The South African Marxists were in this period becoming known by some labour historians, and there was some interest in concepts such as internal colonialism (Wolpe) and the importance of capitalism to sustain racial exploitation. In Australia in the mid 1970s, Mervyn Hartwig and others attempted to adapt these models to the Australian Aboriginal situation.

A significant milestone in the development of the field of Aboriginal history was the publication in 1975 of *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination: Race Relations in Colonial Queensland*, by Raymond Evans, Kay Saunders and Kathryn Cronin, republished in 1988 and 1993. The book is primarily about racism towards Aboriginal, Chinese, and Melanesian people, and its consequences in brutal and destructive institutions and behaviours. In relation to the employment of Aboriginal labour, their account emphasises the use of force in the recruitment and management of Aboriginal labour for "tasks considered demeaning and arduous by whites - such as scrub-clearing or the traditional hewing of wood and drawing of water". Children were abducted for labour purposes, employers exercised extremely harsh discipline, and Aboriginal workers were paid with only the roughest and cheapest food and clothing. A similar account, using additional research from white documentary sources, was provided fifteen years later in Andrew Markus's *Governing Savages*. Concentrating on the Territory in the 1920s and 1930s, Markus points to the forcible removal of children, and the sending at age fourteen of the boys to work on pastoral properties and the girls to domestic service (25), the exceptionally poor remuneration in any form to Aboriginal workers, and the subjection of Aboriginal workers to harsh discipline, including beatings, chaining, and shootings.

A very different approach is taken by Ann McGrath in her path-breaking *Born in the Cattle*. Although covering roughly the same place and period as *Governing Savages*, *Born in the Cattle* works within quite a different historical tradition, as the titles of the two books so clearly testify. Making extensive use of oral history alongside conventional written sources, McGrath is able to provide an immediate and lively account adopting as far as possible the point of view of the Aboriginal people who worked and lived on the cattle stations of the Northern Territory between 1910 and 1940. The difference between this and so many other works of Aboriginal history is in its emphasis on culture not as a static entity destroyed by colonisation, but as the means through which people lived their lives, adapting to new circumstances. The book is written in the style of the new cultural history, informed by anthropological cultural insights and fieldwork methods, and demonstrating the importance of E.P. Thompson's argument that we cannot think "economy" without thinking "culture". In that spirit, it is full of individual and collective detail, and stories told by participants. This approach affects the analysis, including as it does the more positive accounts older people will generally give of their lives to outsiders, as the meaning of a life is considered and reflected upon in response to a young interviewer's questions.

The results of McGrath's study are important for the development of an Aboriginal labour history, allowing a much more complex and culturally rich account than had thus far been able to be developed from the written records. In the cattle country, McGrath begins, Aborigines "tell of lives spent in an historical landscape which combines two worlds - the bush and the cattle station" (viii). Through the book she describes the working and living conditions of Aborigines on the stations, working in a wide variety of tasks under differing conditions. Despite the many oppressive features of their situation, the cattle industry enabled Aborigines

to retain more autonomy than in other industries (173). Far from having sold out by having worked for the white people, Aboriginal people on the cattle stations felt they had found a way to stay on their own country and look after it: "They worked not just for tucker, but literally to 'hold onto' their land, and keep it alive".

Henry Reynolds's *With the White People: The Crucial Role of Aborigines in the Exploration and Development of Australia* (1990), maintains some of this cultural approach to Aboriginal labour history, though using very different, and more difficult, sources. The book provides a survey of the use of Aboriginal labour by white people, considering the continent as a whole from 1788 to the First World War, and thus relies heavily on white-authored written sources. Typically, Reynolds does not engage directly in interpretative or historiographical debate, preferring a more direct narrative addressed at a general reader. It is quite clear, however, that his approach is much closer to the emphasis on accommodation of McGrath than that on force and brutality characteristic of both Evans/Saunders/Cronin and Markus. He stresses the extensive use of Aboriginal labour in the nineteenth century, in the south east as well as the north and west. The town camps which developed in most colonial towns became both a gathering place for Aboriginal people, and also a base from which Aboriginal labour could be offered on casual and intermittent terms. In rural areas, the combination of casual work and the traditional quest for food had become the standard pattern, so that by the late nineteenth century quite high rates of Aboriginal employment by whites were recorded. Reynolds also emphasises the degree to which Aboriginal labour was simply not able to be coerced, as in most of the continent for most of the period before the First World War they could simply walk away, most of the time. As a result, Aboriginal people worked intermittently, casually, and only when they needed to: "While working fitfully for the whites they sought a stable and satisfactory synthesis between the old ways and the new" (130); "They worked when they pleased and on their own terms" (156).

ABORIGINAL NARRATIVES

You will have noticed an asymmetry here. The feminist histories were mainly written by white women, the Aboriginal histories by non-Aboriginal people, women and men. So, one group - white women - is writing an aspect of its own history, while another - Aboriginal people - is being written about by others. In recent years this pattern is changing, and the boundary between the two fields of history is starting to blur. Important in both developments has been the emergence into written form of the strong voices of Aboriginal people, including many Aboriginal women.

Many Aboriginal people resent being written about by white academics at all, some asserting a desire to "take back custody of our own history", and to "rectify the white misconceptions about our history by writing it ourselves". In the context of the Mabo debate, Ruby Langford Ginibi was reported in the Herald on 26 June 1992, speaking of her plans to write about her own experiences, to tell the history of her people from their perspective. "For decades," she said, "white academics, anthropologists and big-shot authors have ripped our culture off for the glory of a few bucks. They never portray anything good about our culture. How they perceive our people is the thing that perpetuates the racism and stereotyping of Aboriginal people.... If people are finally going to acknowledge that we are the indigenous people of this land, they've got to know our history.... And they've got to know it from our side of the fence". Aboriginal people, she says in her book, *My Bundjalung People* (1995), need to learn how to write, get information, and tell their own stories. "The more of our people who write the better", she says, "so more whites can learn about us. Some of them don't want to know but a lot do."

This telling of the story from an Aboriginal perspective has been proceeding apace, with a rapid growth in Aboriginal life-writing, especially autobiographies, life stories, biographies, transcribed oral histories, some with ghost writers "as told to ...". This is now a large and thriving genre, and a good many of these texts focus on the experience of working for non-Aboriginal people. Some of the important texts by Aboriginal men, such as Robert Bropho, Bill Rosser, Bill Cohen, and Joe McGuinness, describe working as drovers, stockmen, and rural labourers. Major female Aboriginal autobiographies and biographies include those by Margaret Tucker, Della Walker, Evelyn Crawford, Ruby Langford Ginibi, Roberta Sykes, Rosemary van den Berg, Sally Morgan, and Jackie Huggins.

HISTORY, GENDER AND ETHNICITY

This growing body of Aboriginal writing has significance in many ways, but the aspect I want to concentrate on here is its importance for the growing study of the intersections between gender and race. From this Aboriginal-authored life-writing, we can begin to see that Aboriginal women and white women live within entirely different historical narratives. For Aboriginal women, the separation of children from their parents through much of the twentieth century is a crucial story, and one in which the complicity of white women figures centrally. In *My Bundjalung People*, Ruby Langford Ginibi says that many white people "knew they were taking away the children but didn't have the guts to speak out" (120). When she spoke about the removal of children to a white audience "the older ones later admitted they knew! I was horrified and asked why didn't some of them cry out in anger. We are human beings you know..." (120-1). Rarely do white women realise how much Aboriginal women see them as part of the problem rather than the solution, as the willing agents of an oppressive regime, colluding in the taking away of children and the exploitation of Aboriginal women. The history of white women's relation to the removal of Aboriginal children has yet to be written.

For white feminist historians, what has mattered so far is the story of their own struggles with white men for a sense of equality and bodily integrity. Nevertheless, in response to Aboriginal women's commentary in books, at conferences and in political meetings, some white feminists have begun to develop, belatedly, some understanding of the issues, and this is beginning to be reflected in the histories. Feminist historians have increasingly recognised that gender relations are formed within a racial - in our case, colonial - structure, not outside or against it, and have come to take cognisance of Aboriginal women's insistence on the primacy of their cultural, Aboriginal, identity. The influence has not only been from Aboriginal women but also from the agonising within feminist theory itself. In addition, overseas influences from black American writers such as bell hooks began to be felt in Australia especially from the late 1980s. Important Australian histories of race and gender have included Lyndall Ryan's *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (1983), stressing in particular the ways in which Tasmanian Aboriginal women sought alliances with European whalers as a response to the new and desperate situation that colonisation presented, and Diane Barwick's account of the different experiences of Koori men and women on missions and reserves in Victoria in the nineteenth century. Ann McGrath's *Born in the Cattle* is structured very much around a gendered analysis, showing the different situations of Aboriginal women and men, paying considerable attention to Aboriginal women's labour both as stockworkers and domestic servants, and considering closely the sexual dynamics of race relations on the cattle stations.

One of the most recent attempts to bring women's and Aboriginal history together is the feminist history, *Creating a Nation*, jointly authored by Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Marian Quartly and Ann McGrath. I'd like to spend the rest of this paper discussing this text.

I regard this as a significant book, signalling a shift from "women's history" to a general Australian history foregrounding the relations between men and women. It rests firmly on the scholarship generated by the coming together of a confident historical profession with the powerful concerns of the modern women's movement. The initial call in the early 1970s for a new women's history met with some derision; even the more sympathetic suggested that women's small presence in public life meant there would be no sources. *Creating a Nation* demonstrates clearly that asking feminist questions has made Australian history much richer, more complex, and more interesting. Feminist perspectives have become mainstream - not uncontested, but well established at the centre of debates, research, and historical interpretation. I have not seen a review, including even the highly critical and downright waspish review by John Hirst in *The Australian*, which did not accord the book considerable importance in Australian historiography.

Very largely a social and political history, *Creating a Nation* sets out to displace "women as victim" histories. It looks at changes in women's experience of reproduction, motherhood, and paid and unpaid work, and especially public debate over their nature, rights, and duties. A great deal of the book is almost a hymn to the importance of women's labour in colonial and then twentieth century Australian society, with much stress on hard physical work, poor conditions, poverty, and lack of freedom of movement.

Especially powerful are the chapters by Ann McGrath on the sexual dimensions of the interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. We are offered a dreamlike vision of an Arcadian world, intruded upon by usually uncomprehending, moralistic Europeans. The story of Warreweer giving birth in the township of Sydney Cove in 1791, assisted by some British women invited to attend, is striking indeed. The women's immediate cutting of the umbilical cord and washing of the baby, against Aboriginal tradition, symbolises a contradiction between white cultural arrogance and shared female experience, explored in the rest of the book.

The discussion of convict society proceeds at a lively, even breathless, pace. Placing issues of marriage and sexual relations right at the centre of the story makes this highly unusual society comprehensible. The analysis of the growth of free immigration is fascinating, and Marian Quartly has even managed to make Caroline Chisholm fresh and interesting. Patricia Grimshaw presents us with a complex analysis of political debates around both the claims of capital versus labour and the social position of women, and it is in her chapters where the emphasis on women's economic value, and the hardships many experienced, is most apparent. Marilyn Lake provides a crisp and lively discussion of debates over the family wage, motherhood endowment, child endowment, and then equal pay. Ann McGrath's later chapters include some excellent and powerful analysis of the sexual dimension of racism.

Because it tackles so much, *Creating a Nation* sometimes gets into difficulties. There is a disjunction between the stress on those things which divide men from men and women from women - race, ethnicity, class, political philosophy and generation - and the frequent reassertion of very broad generalisations. Throughout the book the sexual categories slip and slide, sometimes disappearing in the face of other oppositions, sometimes reasserting themselves as internally unitary and exclusive groups. Speaking of the end of the 1930s Depression, and the aspirations and fears that arose from it, and arguing that while men wanted full employment women wanted fewer babies, the authors write: "Men's dreaming arose from a sense of loss and harkened back to imagined glories... Women's dreaming arose from a lack of self-possession and freedom." John Hirst criticises this section, arguing that Lake in particular has a "tendency to push men and women further apart than they were to create her gender dynamic", and criticising this particular example by replying that the desires for full employment and fewer children were both shared by men and women alike.

My concern with the same section is more at the level of theory. While Marilyn Lake

in particular argues that this appearing and disappearing of unified sexual categories is an inevitable part of the process of developing a gendered historical analysis, in my view our task as analytically minded historians is to keep gender as a major category of analysis without using "men" and "women" as even temporarily unified categories in this way. This is where recent feminist theory influenced by poststructuralist and postcolonial perspectives has had most to offer. Instead of posing against one another the analytical categories of gender, race, and class, as so many of us used to do, worrying over their relative salience in any given historical situation, we can instead use forms of analysis in which each - class, race and gender - operates always through the others, and none of them is any less powerful for that. *Creating a Nation* as a text as a whole seems sometimes to rest on this theoretical recognition, and sometimes to revert to a more simplistic and artificially distinct set of analytic categories.

One of the most negative reviews so far has been John Hirst's review in *The Australian*, entitled "Is Feminist History Bunk?" Hirst argues that feminist historians want to have it both ways, to emphasise women's exclusion from power, and to emphasise women's agency and equal place with men in history, especially the history of the nation. If women lacked power in the public sphere, he argues, then they simply could not influence public events to the extent that men did, and it distorts history to write it as if they had. In trying to give women an equal place with men in history, he says, the authors of *Creating a Nation* are forced to place too great an emphasis on women's political activity, such as women's campaigns against price rises during World War I, simply to give women a greater part of the story. Rather than transforming the national history, they have simply added the gender theme to it.

Hirst seems to me to be both right and wrong, to both have a point and yet to miss the point. The point he has is that if one keeps one's historical categories intact, and one's focus of interest on those spheres of life from which women were largely excluded, then the giving of equal time in the narrative to men and women may indeed appear forced and ideological. The retention of such a strictly political notion of nation, as is evident in *Creating a Nation*, means that there is at times something forced about the emphasis on female activity (though in the light of most histories, I can't say I feel very bothered by this myself). There is a related theoretical issue here, that of the notion of "agency". John Hirst thinks that an emphasis on women's agency must distort the narrative, since there was so much they were not allowed to do. Hirst, it seems to me, is confusing here the issues of agency and power: one can be both relatively powerless and yet an historical agent. What cannot be achieved directly, in, say, parliamentary debate, is expressed elsewhere, in other spheres, in the workplace, the street, the theatre, or the home, behind the backs of the powerful.

The point he misses is that if one changes one's criteria of significance altogether his concerns cease to be relevant. In a move reminiscent of the objections to "women's history" raised a quarter of a century ago, Hirst suggests that childbirth, unlike national politics, is an ahistorical human experience "since childbirth is a natural process not varying from nation to nation or between tribe, empire, and nation". One of the achievements of feminist history, and social and cultural history along with it, has been to suggest that nothing humans experience is outside history. Childbirth varies enormously from culture to culture, and from time to time. The importance of the newer social and cultural histories has been precisely that they direct attention to those things we tend to think are without history, are somehow natural and eternal, such as the nature and experience of the body, and of sentiments and emotions, of lifecycle experiences of birth, ageing, death, and of dreams, smells, love, fear and hope. The commonality of some human experiences does not remove them from history, or the eye of the historian.

It is the combination of Aboriginal and feminist histories that is one of the things that makes *Creating a Nation* important. Several reviewers, however, have expressed concerns.

Helen Irving for example in *Australian Women's Book Review* finds the combination often problematic and discomfoting, with moments of real discord, as when dealing with inter-racial rape. For Kay Saunders in *Australian Historical Studies*, on the other hand, it is the separation not the combination of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal feminist narratives which is of major concern, leading to a situation where the conquest of Aboriginal people is unacceptably "deleted from the nation-building narrative". Meaghan Morris in *Meanjin* similarly finds that the formal distribution of the Aboriginal chapters at the beginning, middle and end of the book frames these as interludes, separate from the rest of the story.

I share all these concerns, and there is indeed an awkwardness here, yet my over-riding feeling is that this is nevertheless the most thorough attempt to date to make feminist and Aboriginal perspectives interconnect and inform one another. As Aboriginal critiques of and interventions in Australian history-writing increase, so will non-Aboriginal histories have new opportunities and be able to find ways to break more thoroughly with its past traditions of settler narratives.