

Conclusion

When Cathy Freeman ran for Olympic gold in Sydney in 2000, it was in a vastly different Australia from that in which a young Evonne Goolagong first picked up a tennis racket in the 1950s. While Aboriginal people had protested the injustices of colonisation since European settlement began, protest accelerated across the country from the 1960s, and became more broadly based. For many non-Aboriginal people, the intensification of demands for specifically Indigenous rights during the 1970s and 1980s, particularly for land rights, seemed radical and potentially threatening. Likewise in New Zealand, Māori had sought to have the Treaty of Waitangi honoured, and protested when it was not, almost from the day it was first signed. Protest intensified from the late 1960s, and many Pākehā responded to calls for self-determination and the righting of land-related grievances with alarm and uncertainty. A second wave of feminist activism also developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, following the first wave in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and seeking more far-reaching change than simple equality in legal terms. Rather, the goal was to transform social and political structures to provide equality of opportunity, and to tear down the structures of male dominance, theorised as the patriarchy. For many outside the movement, this too was an unsettling prospect.

Part of a broader counter-cultural movement, the Aboriginal and Māori rights movements and the second wave feminist movement both contributed to reshaping social and political fabrics in Australia and New Zealand during the second half of the twentieth century. A drive toward assimilation was replaced by official, if limited, acceptance of the idea of self-determination, although this was largely reversed in Australia under the Howard government in the late 1990s. Women's social and political statuses also changed significantly on both sides of the Tasman. These dramatic transformations significantly altered the representational terrain, the contexts in which media depictions of prominent Māori and Aboriginal women were produced.

A number of Aboriginal and Māori women became nationally or internationally prominent during these years of change. Some became well-known for their sporting achievements, some for their work in the performing arts, some for their literary or artistic efforts, some for their labours within political institutions or activist organisations, and some for accomplishments in arenas not addressed in this book for reasons of space. Many of these famous women had complicated relationships with the protest movements that emerged from the late 1960s, relationships which sometimes changed significantly during their lives. Some were particularly involved in one movement, others shared the concerns of more than one, and still others were reluctant to become politically involved at all.

Frequently acclaimed as the first Indigenous person, the first woman or the first Indigenous woman to reach a certain level of success or to attain a particular position, these women's lives, achievements and opinions were often featured in the media, both within their own countries and overseas. Few reached the heights of international fame accorded Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, and few remained household names for any length of time. For some, fame was a fleeting thing. Nevertheless, the increasing numbers of Aboriginal and Māori women becoming widely known in the second half of the twentieth century reflected and to an extent inspired the dramatic social, cultural and political changes of the era.

In these pages, I have explored print media representations of many prominent Māori and Aboriginal women during this period, arguing that these often invoked recurring racialised and gendered tropes, as well as exhibiting common imaginings about an Australian or New Zealand nation, particularly when the woman in question might be understood as representing that nation on an international stage. As I have shown, these prominent women frequently challenged portrayals of themselves in the media, through their own public articulations of their lives and achievements. Further, I have attempted to highlight the shifts and continuities in patterns of representation which occurred over the half century covered by this study. During periods of intense change, particular discursive formations which were previously dominant may become subordinated to others. In print media depictions of famous Indigenous women, several competing and interacting discourses about assimilation, self-determination, Indigeneity, gender and feminism appeared, re-appeared and were transformed.

These shifting discourses often intersected with and were implicated in discourses about the nation. Two settler societies which have shared many historical experiences, Australia and New Zealand have also shared a number of threads in popular and academic conceptualisations of nation and national identity. In relation to the experiences of Indigenous peoples, however, widely-held notions of the nation have been markedly different across the Tasman. New Zealanders have often celebrated relations between Māori and Pākehā as harmonious, a model to the rest of the world. Australians have not been able to do the same regarding the situations of Aboriginal people. Running through this book has thus been an ongoing discussion about differences evident in imaginings of the nation in New Zealand and Australia, as inscribed in the print media on the raced and gendered figures of famous Indigenous women. Although I have had many discussions about trans-Tasman differences in relation to the experiences of Māori and Aboriginal people as I researched and wrote this work, I have become increasingly aware also of parallels in those experiences, and in media representations. There were, it seems to me, frequently only differences of degree, or differences of inflection based upon distinct experiences of colonisation on either side of the Tasman. Through examining portrayals of famous women, I

have therefore also attempted to illuminate the parallel but divergent experiences and ideologies of assimilation, and its waxing and waning, in Australia and New Zealand.

I began this study with a consideration of depictions of Aboriginal and Māori sportswomen, focusing particularly upon Evonne Goolagong. Portrayals of Goolagong displayed an intricate web of popular beliefs about femininity, Indigeneity and nation. Ideas of racial difference, such as the trope of natural physical endowment, were deeply embedded in many depictions of her life and achievements, but she was also represented as a player who embodied particular white norms of femininity in the context of feminist pressure for change in the organisation of tennis as an international sport. Gendered depictions were less common in portrayals of Indigenous sportswomen that mobilised ideas of nation, perhaps reflecting a continuing reluctance to allow that women might represent the nation. At the same time, Goolagong was a comfortable figure to celebrate in mainstream media representations which exhibited an Australian nation, since she was not involved in the Aboriginal rights movement and could be perceived as successfully assimilated. In the last years of the century, media representations of Cathy Freeman that celebrated her as a symbol of reconciliation seemed to reflect a continuing desire to celebrate only those who could be perceived as non-threatening or assimilated. Freeman's success, like that of other well-known Aboriginal achievers, could suggest that hard work and determination were all that was required to succeed, thus upholding an image of Australia as an egalitarian, 'sporting' nation and denying entrenched disadvantage.

In the performing arts too, well-known Māori and Aboriginal women in the 1950s and 1960s were sometimes presented as exemplars of assimilation or integration, or as embodying the harmonious race relations in which New Zealand took pride. These depictions elided the continuing problems of disadvantage and discrimination which faced Aboriginal and Māori people, instead mobilising the racialised bodies of famous women as symbols of successful race relations that might hide potential stains on the national image. Such representations were clearly evident in writing about Dame Kiri Te Kanawa in the early years of her career. While successful Māori and Aboriginal men could also be depicted in such ways, many representations of women active in the performing arts were also heavily gendered. Portrayals of these women as glamorous and exotic beauties combined ideas about race, femininity and modernity in ways which could suggest a link between assimilation and modernity. As a new generation of performing artists appeared from the 1970s who were willing and able to speak out about the situations of Indigenous people both through their work and outside of it, many of these representations began to fade.

In the second half of the book, the focus shifted to women whose public image was more overtly political. In Chapter Four I examined representations of

Māori and Aboriginal women known for their creative work in literature and filmmaking. Literary works, artworks and films are commonly analysed for the messages which they might convey to readers, viewers or listeners, and political issues were often closely intertwined with ideas about the proper nature of art in narratives about these women. Depictions of writers and filmmakers could not easily mobilise them as non-political or as exemplars of assimilation. Unlike in representations of those who were known for their achievements in sport or the performing arts, discourses about the nation were frequently overtaken by discourses about Indigeneity. Gendered depictions were similarly subsumed by racialised depictions, as journalists and critics on both sides of the Tasman read the women and their work in terms of their Indigeneity. For the women themselves likewise, considerations of gender were often less important than issues of oppression based on race.

Many women who became prominent for their leadership activity, activism or work within the institutions of government also focused upon issues affecting Indigenous people rather than upon feminist concerns. To a large extent, portrayals of such women in the media reflected these priorities. In many depictions, the key representational trope was that of the activist. Representations often split along a line between those perceived as moderate and those perceived as radical. In this sense, these women might sometimes be represented as outsiders, threatening to a nation otherwise imagined either as racially harmonious or as racially homogenous. Patterns of representation in the media suggest that it was women such as Whina Cooper, who sought change whilst speaking of unity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, who were likely to be celebrated, while those who spoke more of self-determination and sovereignty were likely to be labelled in extremist terms.

In the final chapter, the divergences between the histories of Indigenous affairs in Australia and New Zealand became more evident. The long history of Māori participation in the parliamentary system stands in stark contrast to the largely recent inclusion of Aboriginal people within the parliaments of Australia. On both sides of the Tasman, however, ideas about gender intersected with ideas about race to disadvantage Indigenous women in terms of parliamentary representation. In the print media, portrayals of Māori women who became MPs again often subsumed gendered images under racialised images, although these women were also represented in gendered frames similar to those evident in representations of other women MPs, particularly in women's magazines such as the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*. Māori women MPs themselves understood their positions as being more to advocate for Māori concerns than to advocate for women's concerns. Depictions also appeared to split along similar lines as did those of women who became known for their leadership, activism or work within the bureaucracy or judiciary: those who were considered radical placed in

contrast to those viewed as moderate. If men and women depicted as extremist activists could be understood as being outside the nation, MPs who were depicted in such ways were implicitly more threatening, placed as they were within the decision-making bodies of the nation.

It is important to acknowledge that none of these depictions were ever hegemonic, for any representation exists alongside other competing representations. There was always a variety of voices, narratives and framings, including those articulated by the women themselves. Media portrayals of famous Māori and Aboriginal women were never fixed or uniform, being shaped by diverse factors and changing in uneven ways. Throughout, I have sought to take into account the historical specificities that may have shaped the representations under discussion, including the changing political and social contexts in which they were produced, their authorship, the divergent genres of publication they appeared within and the distinct fields of endeavour in which particular women became known. In different genres, for instance, different aspects of a woman's career or identity might be given primacy. In an industry publication such as *Opera News*, Te Kanawa might be primarily famous as a fine opera singer, while in the Māori Affairs Department's *Te Ao Hou: The New World*, her status as a successful Māori person might be considered equally significant. Relationships between famous people and the media are, moreover, carefully managed. The careers of many famous Indigenous women display just such efforts at media management, albeit with varying degrees of success. Finally, in any study of representations, it must be remembered that audiences read representations in multiple and conflicting ways, the variety of which is not easily accessible to the historian. The meaning of any particular representation must thus be understood as being inherently unstable.

Given these considerations, a popular approach to the study of representations has been to focus upon highly contextualised case studies. Susan Sheridan, Susan Magarey and Sandra Lilburn adopted such an approach in their study of representations of feminism in the Australian print media, commenting upon both the nature of newspaper research and the 'complexity of the relationship between feminism and the press'.¹ Though not strictly applying a case study method, I have focused upon depictions of several Māori and Aboriginal women whom I identified as among the most well-known and most frequently featured in the media. As well as foregrounding those women who were best known, this approach allowed the complexity of portrayals to be illuminated. Such rich and intricate stories reveal the ways in which human lives and circumstances may shape and transform representations, and acknowledge the women as not just the objects of those representations, but also as individual subjects who both

1 S. Sheridan, S. Magarey and S. Lilburn, 'Feminism in the News', in *Feminism in Popular Culture*, eds. J. Hollows and R. Moseley (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), p. 26.

participated in and grappled with their own media representation. Moreover, it is perhaps in multifaceted stories of representation, like these, that the challenge of bringing history and cultural studies closer together can best be met, as they provide an avenue both for the exploration of cultural processes and for the telling of human stories in all their tangled messiness. While it has not been possible within the bounds of this work to incorporate stories of the making of representations, both inside and outside of the newsroom, studying these would likewise allow this drawing together of the theoretical and the humanistic.

Notwithstanding such complexities and challenges in studying representations, recurring patterns and tropes were clearly evident in many depictions of prominent Māori and Aboriginal women, as I have demonstrated. Further, I have begun to chart the extent to which these patterns and themes were unique to representations of famous Indigenous women, or were replicated in portrayals of other Indigenous women, Indigenous men or non-Indigenous women well-known in the same fields, identifying a number of uneven but clear parallels. The persistence of tropes in relation to ideas of race, gender and nation is suggestive of a continuing ambiguity in the representation of those perceived as different within settler societies, in this case from a white male norm.

Media representations of prominent Indigenous women could contribute to the construction and maintenance of a binary opposition that has often been identified in representations of Indigenous peoples by non-Indigenous peoples: good versus bad. In many of the recurring representational tropes discussed, a line was implicitly constructed or upheld between those who might be considered acceptable models of Indigeneity by non-Indigenous readers and viewers, and those whose version of Indigeneity appeared too challenging. In the description of Cooper as ‘a Maori for all races’ after her death in 1994, for instance, the potential implication was that it was moderate and unifying figures who could be embraced by Pākehā New Zealanders as well as by Māori.² The preferred image of the nation thus continued to be one of harmony and integration. A similar point may be made about ideas of femininity as expressed in many depictions of these famous women. If Te Kanawa and Goolagong might be perceived as embodying acceptable versions of Indigeneity, they might also be perceived as embodying acceptable ideals of (white) femininity. Women portrayed as radical or dangerous activists, on the other hand, could rarely be perceived as embodying either.

A number of authors and scholars have argued that Indigenous people tend to be accepted by non-Indigenous people only when they conform to particular incarnations, those seen as naturally talented entertainers being embraced in contrast to those whose words and actions might appear challenging. In an interview given in 1998, Patricia Grace suggested that while Māori were ‘thought

2 ‘A Maori For All Races’, *Dominion*, 29 March 1994, p. 6.

of only in terms of our myths and legends, arts and crafts, singing and dancing that's acceptable and fine', but if 'seen to move outside those boundaries, we come up against suspicion and barriers'.³ Academic and author Eve Fesl once asserted that Oodgeroo was expected by non-Indigenous Australia only to 'entertain', and to avoid political activism. 'Little has changed', she wrote in 1994, 'for while we "entertain" we are accepted and applauded, but mention "land rights" and the room empties but for a few'.⁴ In the United States, Christopher Campbell similarly identified a supposedly 'positive' portrayal of African-American people in television news broadcasts, according to which success was only acceptable in 'entertainment' (including sport).⁵ Although some Māori and Aboriginal women involved in politically-directed creative endeavour, leadership positions, activism or work in the institutions of government were celebrated, I suggest that those who could be perceived as challenging remained largely excluded from such celebration. Oodgeroo and Cooper, for instance, were celebrated more unequivocally after their deaths than during their lifetimes, and both were implicitly celebrated in contrast to a younger generation of activists who seemed to speak more about self-determination than about achieving unity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. A continuing tension thus existed in representations of well-known Aboriginal and Māori women, between depictions of them as successful, assimilated or modern in which their Indigeneity provided exoticism and newsworthiness, and depictions of them as fiery and outspoken women who were placed as the potentially threatening Other to an invisible but powerful white male norm.

This book, however, has been about more than simply the depiction by others of famous Indigenous women. It has also been about 'representing difference' in a broader sense, and an important theme has been the multivalent nature of the concept of 'representation'. Famous women were not only represented in the media by others. On the contrary, they represented themselves publicly in a variety of ways and navigated multiple positions as representatives of Māori or Aboriginal people. Penny Van Toorn has suggested that Aboriginal authors have found 'that Australia's structures of race impose a representative role, and that to decline such a role is in many ways to risk being perceived as culturally inauthentic'.⁶ It was not only writers who were placed in such a role. Moreover, representation could play a part in the work and achievements of these women through the very nature of their field of endeavour. Sports stars represented their nations when competing in international competitions, but they might also, as women like Goolagong and Freeman demonstrated, mobilise that role for other

3 A. Sarti, *Spiritcarvers: Interviews With Eighteen Writers From New Zealand* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 54-55.

4 E. M. D. Fesl, 'The Road Ahead', *Australian Literary Studies* 16, no. 4 (1994), p. 144.

5 C. P. Campbell, *Race, Myth and the News* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995), p. 62.

6 P. Van Toorn, 'Aboriginal Writing', in *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, eds. S. Kleinert and M. Neale (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 314.

representative purposes. Writers and filmmakers not only represented a particular view of the world to their readers and viewers through their work, they were also able to speak to political issues, and hence to make representations for a group or cause. In a similar way, musicians, actors and other performing artists could use their art, or their position as famous people, to speak politically. Those involved in leadership or activism clearly acted as advocates for a cause, while those who became MPs entered houses of representatives not solely as representatives for their electorate or party, being also perceived as representatives of all Māori or Aboriginal people by virtue of their participation in a group identity. As is evident from this discussion, many such representative statuses revolved around Indigeneity rather than around gender, although not exclusively so. Prominent Aboriginal and Māori women were often ambiguously placed in relation to being able to act as representatives of an Australian or New Zealand nation, an ambiguity perhaps intensified by the dominant social and cultural positioning of women.⁷ Some of the famous women in this study were imagined as representing the nation in depictions in the press, especially when performing or competing overseas, while others were metaphorically denied such a status through depictions which placed them as radical, part of an unrepresentative minority.

Underlying this book has been an understanding that representations of the lives, achievements and actions of prominent people, in the media or in other forums of communication, are part of a wider cultural process of ascribing meanings to those lives, achievements and actions, as well as to other entities or abstract concepts such as race, gender or the nation. I have not sought to replace the multiple, conflicting and shifting meanings ascribed in the media to the lives of prominent Māori and Aboriginal women with my own, nor even with theirs. Rather, I have critically explored those meanings and the ways in which they intersected with popular understandings of race, gender and nation. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, some of the portrayals of Indigenous women discussed in this book appear strange, belonging to a more racist, more sexist past. Others seem quite familiar, descriptions that can still be found in the popular media and elsewhere. As I have demonstrated, they were part of a web of gendered and racialised representations, the echoes of which still resonate. The places these women, and those who follow them, will hold in national memories in the future remains to be seen. It is certain, however, that the media in all its forms – written, spoken, visual and digital – will play a central role in shaping those memories, and in representing to us our differences.

⁷ Women have often occupied a complicated and ambiguous position in relation to ideas of nation, and to related concepts of representation. See for instance: M. Lake, 'Women and Nation in Australia: The Politics of Representation', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 43, no. 1 (1997), pp. 41-52.