

## **‘All white masters belong to your King’: race, identity and empire**

On Western Australia’s Foundation Day in 1841, Methodist missionary John Smithies caused a minor public controversy, when he decided to prevent the Indigenous children in his custody from taking part in official celebrations to mark the young colony’s progress. These festivities, which included boat regattas, horse races and balls, he described as ‘scenes of evil’. The *Perth Gazette* criticised Smithies’ decision, complaining that such isolation and judgement might prove subversive, encouraging Aboriginal servants to see their white employers as sinners. Smithies retorted that no disrespect or insubordination was intended, but he had a religious duty to protect the children, especially from gambling. The prominence of Indigenous people at the official festivities – which traditionally involved races and spear-throwing contests between Aboriginal men – may have also been a factor in the missionaries’ decision; Perth’s celebrations were, in a sense, both too white and too black. Smithies chose instead to hold a separate feast and cricket match for the mission children, so that they could celebrate their (alleged) loyalty to empire without being exposed to corruption.<sup>1</sup> Such anecdotes are suggestive of the ambiguities and rifts of the ‘civilising’ process; loyalty to empire was vital, but could be experienced best apart from Europeans, and contact with colonists could encourage either virtuous labour or depravity. Meanwhile, the question of who should envisage and define a suitable future for Indigenous and colonial Australia was a deeply contested one.

Australia’s first missionaries and protectors devoted most of their writings to their efforts to ‘civilise’ Indigenous people. Yet, one of the most valuable functions of these records is in illuminating how Evangelical philanthropists saw themselves, including in areas of race, class and nation. As Catherine Hall has observed in her study of missionaries and the anti-slavery movement in Jamaica, ‘These texts explicitly concerned the category black, what it had meant and what it could mean; implicitly they suggested a preoccupation with whiteness, a category that was masked because it was seen as normal.’<sup>2</sup> Of particular importance to this discussion was the contested nature of British authority in the colonies, the sense philanthropists often expressed of being threatened by a depraved colonial population. As Methodist missionary Joseph Orton lamented in his journal in 1840, after touring the newly-invaded Port Phillip, ‘wherever our countrymen go they seem to carry with them a moral pestilence – they are

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1 McNair and Rumley 1981: 56–57; *Perth Gazette*, 3 June 1837, 5 June 1841, 19 June 1841.

2 Hall 1992: 211–212.

the greatest hindrance to Aboriginal instruction and improvement'.<sup>3</sup> Notions of colonial sin were inextricably connected to discourses of social class; nationality was also relevant but in some ways oddly subdued. Efforts to define what it meant to take part in a colonising project which philanthropists both supported and mistrusted raised troubling questions about whether sin, violence and destruction were marginal or intrinsic to empire.

## 'The Lord's enemies in the camp': class, race and criminality

In missionaries' and protectors' accounts of colonial life, divisions between black and white appear as fundamental on the frontier. Cultural theorist Richard Dyer has observed the importance of ideas of whiteness in unifying immigrant nations (he focuses particularly on the United States), noting 'Whiteness has been enormously, often terrifyingly effective in uniting coalitions of disparate groups of people.' However, he adds, 'whiteness as a coalition also incites the notion that some whites are whiter than others.'<sup>4</sup> Whiteness, as a concept, is both useful and problematic when examining sources from early 19th century Australia. Notions of racial difference were clearly a crucial aspect of dispossession, and yet the language of explicit, systematised, quasi-scientific racism that would become so crucial to Australian public life in later decades was less apparent. What emerges instead in philanthropic writings is a sense of imperial authority as contested and under threat from within, as philanthropists accused other colonists of undermining their work. This sense of civilisation under siege was understood through a powerful discourse of class difference.

Concerns about bad influences on Indigenous people were raised in various districts. In South Australia and Western Australia, philanthropists became caught up in disputed policies of isolation and (unequal) integration. These were settlements where Indigenous labour was more appealing to colonists, given the absence of a convict system and (in the case of Western Australia) the scarcity of free migration. The Methodist missionaries in Western Australia had a mandate from the start to teach both black and white children, and they encouraged Indigenous youths into domestic labour. However, as mentioned earlier, they were also anxious about their pupils being exposed to 'frivolities' and immoral influences.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, in South Australia, the Evangelical wish to shield Indigenous people from corruption (articulated by Lutheran missionary Clamor

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3 Joseph Orton, 27 November 1840, Joseph Orton, Journal 1832–1839 and 1840–1841 [hereafter *JOJ*], MF302, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

4 Dyer 1997: 19.

5 For example, John Smithies to General Secretaries, 25 October 1843, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Archive: Australasia 1812–1889 [hereafter *WMMS*], reel 2, Mp2107 (Record ID: 133095), National Library of Australia (NLA). See also, Hetherington 1992: 41, 47–48; Hetherington 2002: 34–35, 116–117.

Schurmann, Methodist advocate John Weatherstone and the first protector Bromley) came into conflict with Governor Grey's initiative to encourage the use of Aboriginal servants.<sup>6</sup>

However, these concerns were minor compared to those expressed in New South Wales, where the threat posed by 'degenerate' white colonists was linked explicitly to the penal system. It was in relation to these districts that philanthropists made their strongest calls for Indigenous people to be totally isolated from colonists. Scholars are continuing to debate the nature of relationships between Indigenous people and convicts. Jan Kociumbas, for instance, has highlighted how racial and convict stereotypes have hindered historical understanding. She warns of the danger of uncritically accepting missionaries' descriptions of convicts as brutal and sexually violent towards Indigenous people, noting how blaming – and to some extent displacing – violence onto convicts served to reinforce Evangelical ambitions for a more bourgeois colony of free workers.<sup>7</sup> However, while Kociumbas's critique is valuable, further discussion is needed. A more imperial focus demonstrates that these Australian arguments were, in fact, part of a much broader Evangelical conversation. Furthermore, while British publications tended to place violence and sin on the peripheries of the imperial world, this contrasted with the writings of local missionaries and protectors, whose approach to class and criminality could be more complex. My use of these records is intended not so much to illuminate Indigenous-convict relationships (although that topic is certainly important), but rather to consider the insights provided into philanthropists' views about class and authority.

The main relevant British publication in which race, class, gender and sin were discussed together was that of the 1835–37 Select Committee on Aborigines. Archdeacon Broughton and Rev William Yate warned the Select Committee about degrading white influences on Indigenous Australians. In response to a rather leading question, Yate stated that he did not believe urban colonists approved of violence against Indigenous people, but added 'the stockkeepers are convicts in the employ of the farmers, and perhaps at 100 miles distance, and they are quite out of their reach and control.' Unsurprisingly, Yate replied in the affirmative to the subsequent question, 'Is it your opinion that the introduction of a convict population amongst uncivilized and unchristianized tribes must be attended with very serious consequences, in obstructing the efforts of those who are endeavouring to inculcate the truths of Christianity?'<sup>8</sup> Former New South

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6 Protector Bromley to Colonial Secretary, 2 May 1837, State Records of South Australia (SRSA), GRG24/1, Colonial Secretary's Office, Letters and other communications received, no 117 of 1837; John Weatherstone to Colonial Secretary, 29 August 1843, SRSA, GRG24/6, Colonial Secretary's Office, Correspondence files, no 1017 of 1843; Clamor Schurmann, quoted in Matthew Moorhouse to Colonial Secretary, 17 May 1844, SRSA, GRG24/6/1844/488; Scrimgeour 2006: 35–46.

7 Kociumbas 2001: 28–54.

8 Archdeacon Broughton, evidence, 3 August 1835, and Rev William Yate, evidence, 13 February 1836, *British Parliamentary Papers (BPP): Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*

Wales attorney-general Saxe Bannister's brief Australian discussion focused mainly on the need to end convict transportation, while statements from Pacific missionary Rev John Williams and acting Western Australian Governor Irwin asserted that Indigenous people were treated well by most colonists, except the 'lower orders'.<sup>9</sup> However, the most in-depth discussion occurred in the section on Wellington Valley by Church Missionary Society secretary Dandeson Coates. Using excerpts from William Watson's journals, Coates described prostitution, infanticide, venereal disease and the sexual abuse of children. Stockmen were the main culprits, he claimed, and he particularly mentioned abusive behaviour by ticket-of-leave men and Irishmen.<sup>10</sup>

The Select Committee's final report concluded that Indigenous Australians were being degraded by settlers beyond their (supposed) original savagery. Singled out for particular condemnation were cedar-cutters, convict stock-keepers, military parties on punitive expeditions, and remote free settlers. More broadly, the report blamed runaway convicts, sailors, traders and whalers for spreading violence and vice in New Zealand and the Pacific, while Dutch settlers were identified as key perpetrators of destruction in southern Africa.<sup>11</sup> This fit within a general discourse of suspicion about white colonists, in contrast to whom the Evangelical self could be defined more clearly. Jane Samson, for instance, points to missionary discussions about the Pacific, where working class whites (notably escaped convicts) were blamed for corrupting islanders; missionaries, she argues, were influential in shaping the popular stereotype of the dissolute beachcomber.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, Catherine Hall's study of abolitionist writings about Jamaica explores how Evangelical philanthropists attempted to recreate whiteness and Christian bourgeois normality in terms of pity, care and compassion, in contrast to the depravity of plantation owners.<sup>13</sup> The outrages being observed were undoubtedly horrifying, and it should be noted that the Select Committee voiced a wide variety of concerns about global imperialism. Nonetheless, the emphasis on crimes committed by marginalised white figures could imply that Indigenous destruction was largely a result of the spread of criminal working class men beyond state and church authority. This could work to obscure the wider destructive implications of settler-colonialism itself.

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together with minutes of evidence, appendix and index, *Anthropology: Aborigines*, vol 1, 1836: 15, 18, 21, 201, 204.

9 Saxe Bannister, evidence, 19 August 1835, *BPP: Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, vol 1, 1836: 177–178; Acting Governor Irwin to Viscount Goderich, 10 April 1833, *BPP: Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, vol 2, 1837: 135; Rev John Williams, evidence, *BPP: Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, vol 1, 1836: 675.

10 Dandeson Coates, evidence, 6 June 1836, *BPP: Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, vol 1, 1836: 486–489.

11 *BPP: Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, vol 2, 1837: 10, 14–29.

12 Samson 1998: 9, 25–29.

13 Hall 1992: 211–213.

These limitations were also apparent in publications by the Aborigines Protection Society and missionary societies. In 1838, for instance, the APS and the *Colonial Church Record* expressed relief to hear that South Australia would take no convicts, believing 'fearful profligacy and ungodliness' would thus be avoided.

Let us strive to make the settlement of Europeans on the shores of South Australia a blessing to all the native tribes ... a barrier to the enormous mischiefs which the worst part of the convict population of the eastern coast ... more ferocious than the Saracens or the Vandals of former days, may inflict upon the defenceless heathen ... South Australia may be the New England of the East.<sup>14</sup>

This relief served (perhaps inadvertently) to conceal local realities; in fact, South Australia's free settlers, protectors and more systematic land distribution proved no barrier against dispossession in the long term.<sup>15</sup> The implication of more respectable colonists in outrages was not completely ignored; in their 1839 annual report, the APS expressed deep concern about abuses of Indigenous people on Australia's southern coast by 'sealers, whalers, barkers, stockmen, and ... *men from whom a different line of conduct might have been expected*.'<sup>16</sup> However, these publications often implied that white cruelty was, or should be, peripheral to empire. The APS, for instance, accused the Oregon, Puget's Sound and Hudson Bay companies of exploiting First Nations people in North America and also failing to properly cultivate the earth. It was, the society commented, 'awfully sad and solemn to think that the pioneers of civilization – the *outriders* of the whites – are generally the most degraded of their race.'<sup>17</sup> This could make it difficult to acknowledge the wider violence of settler-colonialism itself.

If we shift focus to local missions and protectorates in the Australian colonies, however, a similar but more conflicted picture emerges. In the south-east, working class colonists, particularly those connected to the convict system, were often described by missionaries in vitriolic terms. This occurred most passionately at Wellington Valley, the site of an old convict station. JCS Handt described their white neighbours as the 'very scum of human society', James Günther called them 'an ungodly rotten set', and Watson labelled them 'emissaries of Satan'.<sup>18</sup> The threat of a convict influence was described frequently in terms of siege, attack or infection.

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14 Colonial Church Society (CCS), *Colonial Church Record*, vol 1, no 3, October 1838: 45. Also, Aborigines Protection Society (APS), *First Annual Report, 16 May 1838*, (Monash Microfilm 4094 seg 2, item 30393): 24.

15 Brock 1995: 208, 214, 222.

16 APS, Second Annual Report, 21 May 1839: 7, APS, Transactions, c.1839–1909, MIC/o6550, reel 1 (Records the property of Anti-Slavery International).

17 APS, Third Annual Report, 23 June 1840, APS, Transactions, reel 1.

18 James Günther, journal, 8 July 1838, in Carey and Roberts (eds) 2002, *The Wellington Valley Project: Letters and Journals Relating to the Church Missionary Society Mission to Wellington Valley, NSW, 1830–42*, A

Here, it is useful to consider Joy Damousi's exploration of the role of gender in how Australian convict 'pollution' was imagined. She focuses on allegations of convict women's depravity and its threat to British identity and colonial respectability. She notes that while these women were compared to savages they were generally considered more threatening than Indigenous women, as convicts represented the enemy within, the possibility of British degeneration.<sup>19</sup> Elements of this thinking certainly emerged in some missionary writings. When Watson and Handt first travelled to Wellington Valley, they were offended when their wives were forced to ride in a dray with two convict women, who made 'loose and abusive' conversation.<sup>20</sup> Their colleague Günther was similarly disgusted when his convict servant got drunk in Bathurst, in the presence of Wiradjuri men sent from the mission to escort her. Such women were unwelcome in Günther's household. While he complained about having to do domestic chores when his wife, Lydia, was pregnant and unwell (a scenario that undermined his masculine missionary work, literally and symbolically), he nonetheless added that it would be 'preposterous' to accept another servant from the Bathurst factory – 'they are the outcasts of the outcasts.' He was particularly irritated when one convict woman told a Wiradjuri girl, whom Lydia Günther was training as a servant, not to fuss too much about the housework, scoffing 'Well, if that will not please Mrs G, let her do it herself.'<sup>21</sup> This notion that convict women were a disgrace to white femininity and an unruly force within the home was unsurprising, given missionaries' emphasis on how their free industrious families and pious wives represented the pinnacle of civilisation.

However, for the most part, it was not convict womanhood that most disturbed the missionaries. While Damousi has illustrated how convict women represented fears of pollution *within* white colonial society, a different set of issues emerges when the focus shifts to a racial frontier. For many missionaries, operating in rural districts with a predominantly male white population, it was convict men who threatened the most dire contamination – of Christianity, of Aboriginal people, and of empire. As Elizabeth Elbourne notes in her discussion of the Select Committee, the colonies were portrayed as:

sites of peculiarly unchecked white male sin, indeed, of an almost exaggerated hyper-masculinity, as men indulged in unrestrained appetites to have sex, to exploit resources and to kill. Only Christian men stood between such undomesticated men and their female victims.<sup>22</sup>

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*Critical Electronic Edition* [hereafter *WVP*]: <<http://www.newcastle.edu.au>>; JCS Handt, journal, 28 October 1834, *WVP*; William Watson, journal, 4 December 1832, *WVP*.

19 Damousi 1997. See especially 53–55.

20 Handt, journal, 23 August 1832, *WVP*; Watson, journal, 23 August 1832, *WVP*.

21 Günther, journal, 23 February 1838, 12 May 1838, *WVP*; James Günther to William Cowper, 19 May 1838, Church Missionary Society, Records [hereafter *CMS*], reel 40, AJCP M212, State Library of Victoria (SLV).

22 Elbourne 2003 (online through Project Muse).

The notion that convicts and other dubious colonial characters were a worse threat to civilisation than 'ignorant' Indigenous people was implied by protector William Thomas, when he wrote in his journal about travelling through Port Phillip in 1840 with two Woiwurrung men. He recalled, 'I slept soundly under a Gum tree with 2 armed savages about me, I am sorry to say with more apparent safety than with 2 of my own colour so arm'd.'<sup>23</sup> Anxiety about the convict presence was, however, most prevalent at Wellington Valley, where the missionaries complained that their white neighbours encouraged laziness, swearing, atheism and sexual depravity amongst Wiradjuri people. Günther remarked that he scarcely knew whether their black or white neighbours were more indifferent to Christianity.<sup>24</sup> The mission's own assigned servants caused the greatest distress, though, particularly when it emerged that they had had sex with Wiradjuri women and girls. Günther wrote in his journal in 1838 'The idea of convicts, these wretched characters on a Christian mission, is, I cannot forbear to say it, revolting to my mind.'<sup>25</sup> In tones of despair, he described being under moral attack:

But alas! alas! it is not enough, that we are surrounded on all sides with neighbours that prove a snare to the Native females; we are obliged to have these shameless & voluptuous fellows on our very Establishment ... we have thus at once sowed the seed of destruction and have the enemy strength in the very heart of our Establishment.<sup>26</sup>

He implored the Church Missionary Society in 1841, 'Let us never again engage in a warfare, and have *knowingly* the Lord's enemies in the camp.'<sup>27</sup> Such comments also served as a veiled rebuke to the CMS for refusing to increase mission funding and provide the free, married and pious employees the missionaries had repeatedly requested.<sup>28</sup>

Philanthropic objections to convict transportation were not limited to criticisms of convicts themselves; they encompassed the whole system, sometimes with particular emphasis on how it degraded the powerful as well as the powerless. LE Threlkeld commented in his 1838 annual report that penal labour not only set bad examples to Indigenous people, it also degraded white society; 'the once kind, generous, English character, sinks into that of the merciless slaveholder'. He added that while convicts in isolated circumstances could perhaps be excused for seeking out relationships with Aboriginal women, there could be no excuse

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23 William Thomas, journal, 4 August 1840, William Thomas, Papers, 1834–1868 [hereafter *WTP*], ML MSS 214, reel 1, State Library of NSW.

24 Günther, journal, 3 December 1837, *WVP*.

25 Günther, journal, 2 February 1838, *WVP*. See also Watson, journal, 10 August 1835, *WVP*.

26 Günther, journal, 23 April 1838, *WVP*.

27 James Günther to William Cowper, 18 June 1841, *CMS*, reel 40, AJCP M212, SLV.

28 For example, William Porter to William Cowper, 19 July 1841, *CMS*, reel 40, AJCP M212, SLV; Watson, journal, 6 September 1835, *WVP*.

for the 'White Gentlemen' who did the same thing.<sup>29</sup> Port Phillip chief protector GA Robinson also complained that some of the 'ruffians' who mistreated Indigenous people had learned their behaviour from 'men of education', whom, he believed, should have known better.<sup>30</sup> Such remarks played on expectations of degenerate convict behaviour to demonstrate how sin actually pervaded the whole colonial system.

Such concerns were, again, most prominent at Wellington Valley. Here, missionary correspondent Richard Taylor described to the Church Missionary Society his 1839 visit to the region, commenting with concern at the sinful behaviour of neighbouring Europeans and adding 'This description, I fear, too equally applies to the highest as well as the lowest – from the ruler to the ruled.'<sup>31</sup> The local missionaries often complained that white servants' relationships with Wiradjuri women were condoned by their employers. Watson, for instance, was horrified by the promiscuous mix of gender, class and race he witnessed in 1836, when he travelled to a neighbouring station to visit a female servant who was ill. He found her sharing a tiny hut with several people, including an Indigenous woman who lived with one of the white men. This man replied to Watson's rebukes by saying 'the master sees and knows, and if he allows it, nobody else has ought to do with it.'<sup>32</sup> Watson and Günther complained that virtually none of their neighbours – convicts, emancipated, overseers or masters – were fit to live in a Christian society.<sup>33</sup>

The laziness, viciousness or greed of some settlers of high standing may have been particularly irksome to missionaries and protectors, who were mostly men of lower middle class or artisan backgrounds hoping for upward mobility through their work. Threlkeld told the London Missionary Society's secretary George Burder and treasurer William Hankey in 1825 that he was disturbed that 'publick characters', who ought to take the lead in protecting Indigenous people, seemed indifferent to the racial violence around them.<sup>34</sup> Protector James Dredge was similarly distressed by stories from Daungwurrung people in 1839 about Mr Mundy's men murdering Aboriginal people. He wrote in his journal 'This is another instance of the savage barbarity of "*white Gentlemen*".'<sup>35</sup>

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29 LE Threlkeld, Annual Report, 31 December 1838, WMMS, reel 2, Mp2107, NLA.

30 GA Robinson 2001, '1848 Annual Report', in *The Papers of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate*, Clark (ed) vol 4: 155.

31 Richard Taylor to William Cowper, 6 February 1839, *BPP: Papers Relating to Australia, 1844*, Colonies: Australia, vol 8, 1969: 46.

32 Watson, journal, 12 May 1836, *WVP*. See also 16 September 1835.

33 Günther, journal, 23 April 1838, *WVP*; William Watson to William Jowett, 17 January 1837, *WVP*.

34 LE Threlkeld to G Burder and WA Hankey, 13 October 1825, in Niel Gunson (ed) 1974 vol 2: 187.

35 James Dredge, 8 December 1839, in James Dredge, *Diaries, Notebook and Letterbooks, 1817–1845* [hereafter *JDD*], MS11625, MSM534, SLV.

Perhaps the most provocative comments on class and racial violence came from the Methodist missionaries at Buntingdale in western district of Port Phillip during the early 1840s. While they made reference to the penal system, their comments also hinted at a white brutality that could not be contained easily within convict stereotypes. They voiced opposition to Governor Grey's plans to encourage South Australian settlers to hire Indigenous labourers, claiming bad influences would be unavoidable; the free status of these settlers was, apparently, not enough to allay their fears. Missionary Benjamin Hurst insisted that Indigenous people needed to be isolated from 'the body and soul destroying influence of our ungodly and avaricious fellow countrymen'.<sup>36</sup> He caused particular controversy when he publicly accused some of his neighbours of assaulting and murdering Indigenous people. Here, his class discourse seemed to cause almost as much offence as did the accusations themselves. In 1840–41, Hurst informed the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society and Port Phillip superintendent CJ La Trobe that local colonists were undermining the mission. He added that while many of the culprits were servants and labourers ('the refuse of the Van Diemen's Land prison population'), this was not always the case. Some settlers, 'who would deem it an insult to be classed with shepherds and hut keepers', pursued Indigenous women just as outrageously. Offended by this, the local police magistrate, J Blair, assured La Trobe that the district was no longer populated by convict types, but rather by recent emigrants – 'gentlemen of education and family' and respectable labourers. La Trobe agreed, adding that while 'older hands' might have once committed disgraceful crimes, the recent arrival of gentlemen and a better class of servants guaranteed a more peaceful, law-abiding future. Hurst found himself socially ostracised, and left the district soon afterwards.<sup>37</sup>

Few missionaries or protectors took their concerns as far, or as publicly, as Hurst did, and their complaints about colonists did not necessarily discourage them from supporting further immigration. Here, the emphasis was on making white society more respectable, with occasional mentions of positive side effects for Indigenous people. Günther, longing for more useful and obedient servants, commented 'Oh! what an acquisition a few pious people of the labouring class would be!'<sup>38</sup> Dredge, lamenting the sinful climate of New South Wales in 1838, hoped that convicts would soon be replaced by free settlers; 'Emigration is

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36 Benjamin Hurst to Rev John McKenny, 8 March 1842, *WMMS*, reel 2, Mp2107. Also, Francis Tuckfield to General Secretaries, 30 October 1841, *WMMS*, reel 2, Mp2107, NLA.

37 J Blair to CJ La Trobe, 15 January 1842, *BPP: Papers Relating to Australia, 1844*, vol 8: 185, 191; Benjamin Hurst to General Secretaries, 22 September 1840, *WMMS*, reel 2, Mp2107, NLA; Benjamin Hurst to CJ La Trobe, 22 July 1841, Methodist Missionary Society, Records [hereafter *MMS*], reel 4, AJCP M121, SLV; CJ La Trobe to Colonial Secretary, 19 February 1842, *BPP: Papers Relating to Australia, 1844*, vol 8: 204; Francis Tuckfield to General Secretaries, 16 August 1842, *WMMS*, reel 2, Mp2107; Benjamin Hurst to General Secretaries, 8 July 1843, *WMMS*, reel 2, Mp2107, NLA.

38 Günther, journal, 2 February 1838, *WVP*.

pouring a steady and increasing stream of comparative purity into the stagnant pool of Australian society'.<sup>39</sup> Chief protector GA Robinson even went so far as to tell the 1845 Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines, that Indigenous people's circumstances were improving in Port Phillip, partly because of the increase in free migrants and 'respectable proprietors'.<sup>40</sup> (Robinson's wish to maintain his own beleaguered protectorate was relevant here, but his reasoning is illustrative nonetheless.) Such remarks can seem startling, given philanthropists' awareness of the devastating impact of dispossession. They did not discuss immigration very often, so it can be difficult to judge, but these occasional statements of support do follow a certain logic of encouraging the growth of an empire structured around an Evangelical middle class and strengthened and justified by missionary work.

These issues would become more glaring in British publications, which expressed stronger, more articulate support for free migration to Australia. The *Evangelical Magazine* (1835–36) looked forward to the settlement of South Australia by a young population of equal gender demographic and agricultural interests, hoping this would provide a fresh start for British artisans and rural labourers – 'our peasants, once so distinguished for a spirit of manly independence.' The greater church influence and 'kind and Christian procedure' assumed to accompany this would, they believed, improve Indigenous people's circumstances.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, an 1841 article in the Aborigines Protection Society journal, by an auxiliary of the British and Foreign Society for the Protection of the Aborigines, blamed convicts for the destruction of the Tasmanian Indigenous peoples, but concluded that future problems could best be avoided by providing moral training for emigrants before they left Britain.<sup>42</sup>

Church of England journals particularly praised respectable emigration to Australia around the middle of the century (a time when the first Aboriginal missions and protectorates were collapsing). *The Colonial Church Chronicle* for 1848–50 mentioned Indigenous Australians only rarely and without much optimism. More attention was given to further colonisation, and the hope of seeing 'our noble England spread her roots, and multiply her branches, till she shall have covered all the isles of the East.' The journal argued that free emigration could solve New South Wales's labour shortage and spare Britain the expense of supporting able-bodied paupers. Respectable rural labourers could be attracted with promises of becoming land-owners themselves, as 'fresh tracts of fertile

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39 James Dredge to [unnamed correspondent], 28 November 1838, *WMMS*, reel 1, Mp2107, NLA.

40 GA Robinson, Report to the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines, 1845, in Frauenfelder (ed) 1997: 51.

41 *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, vol XIII, December 1835: 503; *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, vol XIV, February 1836: 51–52.

42 APS, *Extracts from the Papers and Proceedings of the Aborigines' Protection Society*, vol II–III, April 1841: 91.

land are continually being discovered'. The fate of the people already living there was not mentioned.<sup>43</sup> This location of violence and sin on the margins of colonial society, amongst early criminal arrivals now being displaced, enabled Aboriginal dispossession (or at least, its worst excesses) to appear anomalous, not intrinsic to settler-colonialism.

## 'Men, and Englishmen, and ministers of Christ': complexities of mission and nation

During this era, Christian missions and imperial nationalism had become powerfully, if problematically, linked. As noted earlier, missionaries were amongst the empire's fiercest critics, but they could also be outriders of empire, helping form spheres of British influence. Anna Johnston depicts missionary work and writing as central to the imagining and legitimising of British colonialism, while Susan Thorne has argued that the half-century between 1795–1845 saw middle class Dissenters move from the margins of British politics and society to the centre – 'The missionary project helped to associate the Dissenting middle classes with the nation and the nation, in turn, with evangelical middle classes, in the eyes of British society and of the world at large.'<sup>44</sup> At the same time, the mission project could address fear and guilt on a national scale; Elizabeth Elbourne sees the 1835–37 Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) as directly concerned with relationships between nation and God.<sup>45</sup> All of this affected how philanthropic advocates came to understand morality and destruction within colonialism.

Some missionary publications made clear that their work was understood within an imperial framework. At a London Missionary Society valedictory service in 1837, speakers expressed thanks for the support received from all classes of 'British society' and from 'the Parliament of England ... the public of England ... the Colonial Secretary of England'. South Australia, with its promise of respectable settlers and Aboriginal protectors, was praised as a burgeoning colony 'of which a Queen of England need not be ashamed'. Missionaries were reminded to do their duty as 'men, and Englishmen, and ministers of Christ'.<sup>46</sup> At the LMS's 1839 annual meeting, the chair, Sir Culling Eardly Smith, spoke of the refuge of faith amidst political woes. He added, however, 'Not that man by becoming a Christian parts company with his patriotism – his patriotism becomes enlightened, sanctified, and increased.'<sup>47</sup> However, the strongest

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43 CMS, *The Colonial Church Chronicle, and Missionary Journal*, vol II, July 1848: 3–6. See also, CMS, *The Colonial Church Chronicle, and Missionary Journal*, vol III, July 1849 – June 1850: 49–50, 278, 292–295, 425–426.

44 Johnston 2003a: 3, 13; Thorne 1999: 52.

45 Elbourne 2003.

46 LMS, *The Missionary Magazine and Chronicle*, vol 1, no xviii, November 1837: 285.

47 LMS, *The Missionary Magazine and Chronicle*, vol 1, no xxxvii, June 1839: 83.

imperial nationalist sentiments were promoted by Church of England bodies. The CMS *Church Missionary Intelligencer* (1850) contrasted Britain's Christian crusade with the failures of other European empires: degeneracy, apathy, Catholicism. The article concluded 'the living, earnest, expansive Christian, who has a heart big enough to embrace the whole world, is the only true patriot'. An accompanying article argued that England's internal stability was a sign of their special duty to evangelise: 'If our own age is the era for missions, no less plainly is our own country the messenger-people to the whole earth. The Heathen cry, and they cry to us – to Englishmen of the nineteenth century.'<sup>48</sup>

Yet, perhaps curiously, nationality as a topic did not receive much explicit attention in philanthropic writings from the Australian colonies. The emergence of Australian settler identities during this period (generally coexisting with British loyalties) has been traced by historians like Alan Atkinson, Richard White, Neville Meaney and Ben Wellings.<sup>49</sup> However, if missionaries and protectors witnessed such developments they made no reference to them, and their papers contained few overt discussions of British or English nationalities either. Britishness may have been crucial in relation to governance and subjecthood, but it was largely obscured in the realms of identity and society.

There might well have been strategic reasons for a certain vanishing of Britishness, given the mixed cultural backgrounds of missionaries themselves. Paul Jenkins, for example, has noted that by 1824 over a third of the missionaries sent overseas by the Church Missionary Society were from other European countries, mostly German-speaking regions.<sup>50</sup> This was apparent in the Australian colonies; the CMS station at Wellington Valley, for instance, employed JCS Handt, originally a Prussian Lutheran, and James Günther, who was from Württemberg, educated at the Basel Mission Institute. Meanwhile, in South Australia, Lutheran missionaries operated in Adelaide, Port Lincoln and Encounter Bay, and the Moreton Bay station was run by missionaries trained within the Bohemian church and organised by Johannes Gossner. Their German backgrounds, while distinguishing them socially, do not seem to have provoked much discussion or criticism, aside from occasional mutterings by the acerbic William Watson about the CMS favouring his 'German Lutheran' colleagues at Wellington Valley.<sup>51</sup> In a missionary climate reliant on labourers from across Europe, it could be useful to encourage a certain downplaying of nationality within overarching Protestant civilisation.

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48 CMS, *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*, vol I, no 3, 1849 (volume published 1850): 51–52; CMS, *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*, vol I, no 4, 1849 (volume published 1850): 77.

49 Atkinson 1988: 10–15; Meaney 2001: 81, 83; Wellings 2004: 149; White 1981: 52–56.

50 Jenkins 2000: 43–50.

51 William Watson to William Jowett, 12 September 1842, WVP. See also Bridges 1978: 454–455; Johannes Gossner to W Beecham, 27 January 1837, MMS, reel 9, AJCP M126, SLV; Le Couteur 1998: 141, 143.

At the same time, Britishness could be imagined in terms of an expansive, imperial subjecthood, associated so closely with 'civilisation' itself that there was little need to differentiate between the two. By the late 1840s, writers for the Aborigines Protection Society and the Church Missionary Society were reminiscing (albeit with some ambivalence) about the glory of the Roman empire and its lessons for Britain. Highlighted was the Roman policy of sharing civilisation and incorporating colonised peoples as loyal subjects.<sup>52</sup> Thus, in missionary writings, Britishness was associated most powerfully with what Krishan Kumar has called 'state-bearing' peoples, who embraced an imperial or 'missionary' nationalism, subsuming their identity in their 'two empires': Great Britain at home and the colonies abroad.<sup>53</sup> Within such imperial and state-based nationalism, philanthropists could demand that colonised peoples be recognised as British subjects, while still insisting that 'civilisation' (and the full social inclusion that went with it) would have to be taught and worked towards.

Visions of expansive Britishness could be both potent and problematic. This was hinted at when Lake Macquarie missionary LE Threlkeld turned Britannic people into subjects of cultural critique. During the late 1820s, Threlkeld urged the London Missionary Society not to underestimate Indigenous Australians' capacity for Christian progress, reminding them that the English themselves were descended from bloodthirsty, primitive pagans. People who remembered the British resistance to Roman occupation admiringly might, he said, have felt a similar respect for Aboriginal resistance, had it only been militarily stronger. Again, in 1838, he encouraged the New South Wales government not to despair of Aboriginal prospects; after all, the Romans had once thought the Britons too savage to improve – 'Such was the character of our forefathers, the White Aborigines, given by her darker colored conquerors.'<sup>54</sup> In his 1850 publication, *A Key to the Structure of the Aboriginal Language*, Threlkeld told his readers once more that the nudity and traditional dancing of the Awabakal people were probably similar to the customs of ancient British tribes.<sup>55</sup> Related imagery was used by protector William Thomas, when he first arrived in Port Phillip. He reflected in his journal on his early meetings with Kulin peoples:

As they descended the hill with their spears, &c, I have gazed upon them and thought of what materials our forefathers were. Oh that God

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52 Aborigines Protection Society (APS), *Annual Report*, 3 May 1848: 16, APS, Transactions, reel 1; CMS, *The Church Missionary Intelligencer: A Monthly Journal of Missionary Information*, vol I, no 3, 1849: 51–52.

53 Kumar 2003: xi, 31–37, 179, 186, 193.

54 LE Threlkeld, London Missionary Society, Mission to the Aborigines, New South Wales: Circular, 8 October 1828, London Missionary Society Records (LMS), AJCP M73, SLV; LE Threlkeld to E Deas Thomson, Annual Report, 31 December 1838, in Gunson (ed) 1974 vol 1: 149.

55 LE Threlkeld, 'A Key to the Structure of the Aboriginal Language', reproduced in LE Threlkeld 1892, *An Australian Language As Spoken by the Awabakal, the People of Awaba or Lake Macquarie*: 88–89.

who called our ancestors from their wild state would look down on these and make us who are sent for the purpose of civilizing them the honoured instruments.<sup>56</sup>

Such comments presented a challenge to colonial racism and a call to universal humanity, and they may have destabilised somewhat the 'normal' order of imperial dominance. (Duncan Bell, for example, has argued that references to ancient Rome in Victorian discourse were marked by anxiety as much as by identification, with strong awareness of Rome's decline and fall.)<sup>57</sup> However, philanthropists' emphasis on the power of civilisation to elevate barbarians served to highlight, not minimise, the alleged differences between Indigenous people and British imperialists. The emphasis was less on challenging binaries of 'savagery' and 'civilisation' and more on emphasising the possibility of moving between them. Moreover, another contrast was also reinforced: between visible, ethnic 'Others' and rational, civilised observers, as represented by Threlkeld and Thomas. Here, civilisation – which the British were shown to have attained – was associated with an authoritative invisibility, a power to look and define.

The possibilities and limitations of inclusive Britishness were also suggested in formal missionary publications, where comparisons were made between colonised peoples and 'inferior' whites. A striking example occurred in the Aborigines' Protection Society's journal *Colonial Intelligencer* (1849–50), which contrasted the advance of the North American Seneca people in farming, building houses, educating their children and giving up alcohol, with the supposed filth and laziness of Irish peasants, whose poverty was blamed on their own savagery. At the same time, mention was made of the achievements of Irish intellectuals; if this race could produce superior specimens, surely indigenous races could do likewise. The same edition highlighted the violent ambitions and degraded habits of other European nations, who had abandoned true Protestantism, as well as the supposedly contemptible state of the urban poor.

Which would appear the most hopeless task – to endeavour to educate and refine the Indian and the New Zealander, or to induce those dissolute inhabitants of the crowded courts of our large towns to abandon their habits of idleness, filth, and immorality, for those of the respectable and rising mechanic?<sup>58</sup>

Such claims promoted imperial missionary work by combining a message of universal human potential with the strategic use of tropes of Irish and working-

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56 William Thomas, January to March 1839 journal, in Cannon (ed) 1983, *Historical Records of Victoria: Aborigines and Protectors, 1838–1839 (HRV)*, vol 2B: 438.

57 Bell 2007: 207–230.

58 APS, *The Colonial Intelligencer, or Aborigines' Friend*, vol II, 1849–50: 131; APS, *Transactions*, reel 3. Also: 70, 133.

class hopelessness and Continental degeneracy. On one level, the journal did minimise racial difference, but challenges to inequality were limited here. The assumed superiority of dominant British classes went unquestioned, and the suggestions of racial equality focused deliberately on Indians and Maori, as supposedly higher races.

The ongoing notion of hierarchies of civilisation was apparent in records from the Australian colonies, when philanthropists tried to educate Indigenous people about other colonised nations, allegedly further advanced in Christianity. Maori were held up as a particular example. Protector William Thomas mentioned the 'New Zealand Blacks' in his sermons to Kulin peoples in Port Phillip, and Maori were also discussed at Wellington Valley. Watson and Günther were glad that some Wiradjuri men had met Maori people in Sydney, hoping these more 'advanced' natives would serve as role models. In their sermons, they described how Maori prayed and learned to read.<sup>59</sup> This indicates how missionary 'knowledge' was not merely broadcast from a central British metropole, but rather passed around the empire, mingling with local needs. In 1838, for instance, missionary James Günther went out cutting bark with a group of young men from Wellington Valley and read aloud to them from *Campbell's Travels in the South of Africa*. He especially pointed to 'the Blacks of that country being much better than themselves, more attentive to the missionaries etc etc and exhorted them by their example.'<sup>60</sup>

## 'Black fellow won't believe you': vision, struggle and legitimacy

Debates over class, gender and nationality pointed to a discursive contest over who would have the power to envisage and define the colonial future. Within such debates, Indigenous people's own views on nationality were mentioned only occasionally. The London Missionary Society published with relish speeches made at Exeter Hall by African converts, who spoke of their eagerness to become British subjects and 'children of England'. These speeches – no doubt strategic or edited performances of Christian civilisation – helped create precisely the image Evangelical philanthropists sought, one which defined them as 'real' Britons, in contrast to thuggish, racist colonists. It particularly bolstered missionary aims to reshape colonialism in the Cape colony. The 'Caffre Chief Tzatzoë' commented 'Many Englishmen in the colonies are bad, but I will hardly believe that these Englishmen belong to you. You are a different race of men – they are South Africans – they are not Englishmen.'<sup>61</sup>

59 See, William Thomas, 7 July 1844, *WTP*, ML MSS 214, reel 3, State Library of NSW; Watson, journal, 29 December 1833, 26 April 1834, 9 January 1835, *WVP*.

60 Günther, journal, 17 August 1838, *WVP*.

61 *LMS, The Missionary Magazine and Chronicle*, no IV, September 1836: 56.

However, Indigenous Australians' opinions on Britishness do not seem to have been eagerly sought or recorded. On one rare occasion in 1834 when Britishness was discussed, the emphasis was on the visible ethnicity of other nations, in relation to the imperial state. A young Wiradjuri girl, Geanil, had asked missionary William Watson about the backgrounds of settlers in Wellington Valley.

Geanil: Who is that white master, Mr Watson, is he an Englishman?

Mr W: No.

Geanil: O. He is an Irishman then?

Mr W: No. He is a Scotchman. He comes from another country, but is also belongs to my King.

Geanil: All about master belong to your King, King William.<sup>62</sup>

When this dialogue was reproduced in the CMS *Missionary Register* it was altered slightly. 'White master' became 'Gentleman', the neighbour became a 'Scotch Gentleman', the question of Scottish sovereignty was raised by Geanil, and Geanil's last remark became 'all white masters belong to your King'.<sup>63</sup> These alterations may have been innocuous, intended to make the conversation flow better, but the result was a slightly greater impression of settler respectability and Wiradjuri interest in the reach of empire.

Elsewhere in missionaries' records, there are traces of how their representations of different national groups could be reinterpreted, utilised or challenged by Indigenous people. Wiradjuri people, for instance, used understandings of the 'superior' Maori to strengthen their own demands and point out missionary weaknesses. When requesting guns for hunting, the young men reminded Günther: 'New Zealand from Black fellows got guns'. Günther's response emphasised the superiority of Evangelical civilisation, while also suggesting unease at the spread of imperialism in unruly, secular forms:

Yes ... I will tell you what they say: 'We were very glad when English men came, & brought us guns & brought us shooting; but we were still more glad when you, Missionaries came & taught us to read'.<sup>64</sup>

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62 Watson, journal, 2 September 1834, *WVP*.

63 CMS, *Missionary Register*, September 1836: 427.

64 Günther, journal, 28 June 1838, *WVP*.

Such explanations were not necessarily accepted. The young man Jemmy Buckley laughed at Günther's lectures about how lazy and ungrateful Aborigines were compared to the New Zealanders, retorting 'Very well, go to New Zealand; there are the good Natives!'<sup>65</sup>

The visibility of Britishness to Indigenous people could be a point of some concern to missionaries, when they found themselves unable to control how it appeared. This was hinted at in 1840, when young Daungwurrung men questioned Port Phillip protector James Dredge about his origins. His account of their conversation about England was marked by a mixture of vibrant imagery and fear that the Christian nature of his mission would be obscured by the material details of civilisation.

When I informed them of the great distance [from England], that we were 5 moons without seeing anything but water, that we were sent on purpose to take care of them, they were amazed, as they were also at hearing about the English people, ships, soldiers &c. *Poor things*, I wish I could describe to them the great things their God and Saviour hath done to redeem them.<sup>66</sup>

However, philanthropists soon came to fear that worse images of British civilisation were developing, thanks to the behaviour of other colonists, whose sins undermined Evangelical authority. From their first arrival at Wellington Valley, William Watson and JCS Handt found themselves engaged in contests over the nature of colonial power, marked by intertwining of race and class, the ever-present threat of violence and loss, and the question of whose vision of the future was dominant and legitimate. Local settlers and stockmen – whom Watson called 'agents of Satan' – had told Wiradjuri people to stay away from the mission, warning that their children would be kidnapped and sent to gaol in Sydney, while the men would have to work in the fields, yoked like bullocks. These accusations were repeated again years later. When a young woman, Warrahbin, chose to live at the mission instead of with neighbouring white men, her husband, Narrang Jackey, was told that the missionaries would send all the women away to prison, then transport them to another country. Such claims emerged again when Watson, urging Wiradjuri to compare themselves to 'higher' nations, spoke of his longing to take people to New Zealand to meet the Maori. However, he believed – and they concurred – that they would think he was kidnapping them.<sup>67</sup> Similar concerns were also voiced in Melbourne, when Indigenous women hesitated to send their children to William Thomas's protectorate school, as white men had told them the children would be abducted

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65 Günther, journal, 15 March 1838, *WVP*.

66 Dredge, 27 January 1840, *JDD*, MS11625, MSM534, SLV.

67 Handt, journal, 30 September, 1832, *WVP*; Watson, journal, 30 September 1832, 8 October 1833, 9 January 1835, *WVP*; William Watson, 1832 Report, *WVP*.

onto ships and sent away to Sydney.<sup>68</sup> Philanthropists were angry at being misrepresented, their authority challenged, but their offence may have also been related to the discourse in which they found themselves implicated. The colonists involved may have been thinking of many things, including African slavery, the earlier removal of Indigenous children to the Parramatta school, and the transportation of 'savage' peoples to Britain for public display. Yet, they were also threatening Indigenous people with what had been, essentially, their own convict experience – an experience missionaries found distasteful and antithetical to their plans for Aboriginal advancement. Ironically, over subsequent decades, as former convicts began to prosper and redefine themselves positively as 'native born', their threats would indeed come to shape Indigenous life: incarceration, forced labour, child removal, exile from home. These elements would be alternately opposed and supported by protectors and missionaries.

In imagining future roles for Indigenous people as labourers, philanthropists voiced concerns about the current structure of colonial society, including the penal system and Indigenous people's own capacity to view and interpret the class structure. As Henry Reynolds has observed, philanthropists (at least in the south-east) longed to reshape Aboriginal Australians as respectable workers, whilst at the same time separating them from the actual white working classes.<sup>69</sup> In 1841, for instance, Port Phillip protector James Dredge complained of Indigenous people associating with prisoners and learning their bad behaviour. He attributed this not to Indigenous naivety, but rather to their acute awareness of class distinction; they took liberties with prisoners, he said, that they would not have done elsewhere.<sup>70</sup> Philanthropists worried especially that the convict system, where the labourers lacked freedom or respectability, would make labouring life unappealing to Indigenous people. Quaker missionary writers James Backhouse and George Walker commented on their 1832 visit to Flinders Island that the people there appreciated gifts of European clothing but resented any offer of convict-style garments.<sup>71</sup> Missionary CG Tiechermann noted that Indigenous people in South Australia valued their independence and would only work for Europeans if they could relate to them as kinsmen; being an employee was considered degrading.<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile, at Wellington Valley in 1836, Watson was annoyed when a man called Kabbarrin refused to wear a jacket Watson had bought him, saying it made him look like 'new chum', a newly assigned servant.<sup>73</sup> Such exchanges could signify rejection not only of labouring roles but also of the dynamic of charitable benevolence and gratitude which

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68 Thomas, 27 January 1846, *WTP*, ML MSS 214, reel 3, State Library of NSW.

69 Reynolds 1983: 129–130.

70 James Dredge to Jabez Bunting, 10 May 1841, *MMS*, reel 55, AJCP M172, SLV.

71 Walker 1898: 9.

72 CG Tiechermann 1841, *The Aborigines of South Australia*: 6.

73 Watson, journal, 19 June 1836, *WVP*.

missionaries hoped to establish. Günther's journal recorded a similar incident in 1838, when a group of Wiradjuri men went out to cut wood in the rain, wearing coarse gabardine frocks which the missionaries had lent them. These resembled convict clothing, and the young man Jemmy (Goongeen) joked 'Here they are, all Government men'. Günther realised he was making a point to the missionaries, 'for they do not like at all, to wear the dress of prisoners & often call out with great stress, "We are free men!"'<sup>74</sup>

Once again, philanthropists' concerns touched on issues of higher class status, as well as lower. Handt recorded an incident in 1835, when he visited a camp and tried to talk to people about God. His efforts were rejected, particularly by three men who wore brass name plates and said that they were gentlemen. Handt wrote 'I took occasion from this to talk to them of the pride of the human heart, and of that Great Being, who loves one as well as the other, and with whom there is no respect of persons.'<sup>75</sup> Protector GA Robinson was similarly perturbed to meet some influential men on Mr Docker's station near the Murray, who accepted rations as their due but refused to undertake manual work, telling Robinson they were gentlemen, and 'white gentlemen did not work only poor fellow.' Robinson, himself an upwardly-mobile working class man, blamed colonists for encouraging such ideas, grumbling in his diary that drinking, smoking, swearing and debts were the main signs of a colonial gentleman.<sup>76</sup>

At stake here were issues of colonial authority and identity. In their sinful behaviour, colonists were seen by missionaries as making whiteness hyper-visible and deeply problematic (in contrast to the philanthropists' own whiteness, which was normalised and in many ways obscured). Günther, for instance, found it hard to respond when Wiradjuri men replied to missionary reprimands about sexual depravity by asking 'Why don't you talk that way to White fellas?'<sup>77</sup> His colleague Watson recorded a similar argument with a man called Frederick in 1837. Frederick dismissed Watson's lectures on sin and swearing by saying:

Black fellow won't believe you ... White fellow too swear when he wants Black woman and she won't go with him, he too say never mind parson and swears again, and says bad things of you, I cannot tell you what he says but I dare say you know.<sup>78</sup>

Here, colonists' behaviour was especially unwelcome because it drew attention to the contested, vulnerable nature of philanthropists' authority. Port Phillip

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74 Watson, journal, 26 March 1838, *WVP*.

75 Handt, journal, 19 July 1835, *WVP*.

76 GA Robinson 1998, *Journals: Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate*, Clark (ed) vol 2: 75.

77 Günther, journal, 14 March 1838, *WVP*.

78 Watson, journal, 8 January 1837, *WVP*.

protectors James Dredge, William Thomas and GA Robinson all complained of white men mocking them in front of Indigenous people. Robinson was particularly irked when working class men, hanging around an Indigenous camp near Melbourne, reminded people loudly of his controversial actions in Tasmania, where he had persuaded many Indigenous survivors to withdraw from the mainland to government stations in Bass Strait. These men taunted him 'Are you going to drive the poor creatures away here Mr Robinson as you did in Van Diemen's Land?'<sup>79</sup>

The frustration and anger philanthropists felt here can be understood partly in terms of arguments by contemporary scholars of 'whiteness' about the need for white power to be rendered implicit and impartial. Dyer, for example, argues that the invisibility of whiteness is both an expression and mechanism of power, demonstrating the positioning of whiteness as 'real' humanity: 'Whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen.'<sup>80</sup> Aileen Moreton-Robinson has emphasised the particular importance of this 'invisible regime of power' to Australian life.<sup>81</sup> It can be a challenge, though, to relate such ideas to the early colonies, where racial difference was powerfully and violently enforced but not always articulated in sophisticated ways. Liz Reed has considered how protector William Thomas's accounts of isolation and danger served to construct his own image as Aboriginal 'expert', protecting whiteness from inferior Europeans; this argument is a valuable one, but I would question to what extent 'whiteness' as a trope is appropriate to this era.<sup>82</sup> The broader questions raised about the stability and visibility of colonial power are certainly relevant, though. In such accounts, philanthropists revealed points of weakness and frustration in their own authority, but they also worked to reinforce common Evangelical concerns about class and colonialism; in their papers, anxiety and affirmation co-existed. Imperial authority may have been unstable, but it was also well worth fighting over.

The images philanthropists produced of themselves often emphasised their isolation, struggle and vulnerability in the face of massive immorality. Watson, for example, used his journal to lament his loneliness and feeling of being unappreciated. He wrote in 1836 of:

Having left behind our beloved native land ... to wander, solitary and forsaken ... to be hated by many, loved by none ... to dwell where Satan

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79 Dredge, 17 December 1839, *JDD*, MS11625, MSM534, SLV; Robinson 1998, *Journals: Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate*, Clark (ed) vol 1: 27; William Thomas to CJ La Trobe, 13 April 1840, f67-71, *WTP*, ML MSS 214, reel 4, State Library of NSW.

80 Dyer 1997: 45, see also 1-4, 12-13, 18-20, 35, 45, 52-53.

81 Moreton-Robinson 2004: 75-76, 79.

82 Reed 2004: 88-89, 94, 98.

has his seat – to see in every human face an enemy to our God and his cause ... to labour amongst the very lowest heathens in the world, and to have impediments to our usefulness thrown in our way at every step by men of our own country – bearing the same hallowed name as ourselves.<sup>83</sup>

This image of the philanthropist as outsider has re-appeared, at times, in Australian Aboriginal historiography. Reynolds, for instance, has depicted humanitarians as lonesome figures, considered traitors by their white neighbours, their work bringing the colonial venture into question: 'The Aboriginal cause often did attract outsiders, eccentrics, obsessive personalities ... They came to hate their own society for its unfeeling brutality. Resulting isolation fed further embitterment.'<sup>84</sup> Some other historians have questioned this; Kociumbas, for example, warns that the romanticising of rebels in Australian story-telling (including, ironically, convict history), has carried over into contemporary representations of missionary humanitarians – 'constituted as stirring heroes of this period, courageous campaigners for justice and Aboriginal land rights ... virtually latter-day Ned Kellys, fearless rebels who dared to defy the colonial *status quo*.'<sup>85</sup> While this point has some validity, I would argue that the historiography surrounding Australian missions has been more complex than this. I would also stress that such images of vain-glorious humanitarians are not merely a product of recent scholarship, but can be traced in many ways back to philanthropists' own writings. It is a challenge for historians to examine such matters without obscuring the very real destruction and dispossession that philanthropists were witnessing. Here, it can be valuable to consider further the place of grief, loss and religious struggle in philanthropists' lives. It is also important to encourage ongoing examination of Australia's place within international religious debates surrounding British imperialism. The sense of victimisation philanthropists articulated in the Australian colonies fit into wider Evangelical discourse, but it must also have been influenced by their own relatively minor place within missionary and philanthropic cultures, where, once again, Australian Indigenous issues tended to be relegated to the boundaries.

The troubled tone taken by many philanthropists was genuinely felt, but this was also a productive anxiety, a source of definition and debate. The records of Australia's first missions and protectorates have often been valued for their quasi-anthropological descriptions of Indigenous cultures and languages, but their passionate views about their own society could be, in some ways, more revealing. Their writings bring to light images of a degenerate colonial society,

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83 Watson, journal, 31 December 1836, *WVP*.

84 Reynolds 1998: xiv, also 11–12.

85 Kociumbas 2001: 35–36.

where whiteness was both vaguely defined and vitally influential, intertwined with disputes over class and power. Philanthropists' attempts to implement Evangelical leadership – where Britishness was equated with civilisation but also strategically obscured, and where efforts to incorporate native peoples as British subjects were significant but partial – point to the complex relationship between empire, nation and the civilising mission. Within this, philanthropists may well have wished to render their authority natural and invisible, but they were also required to demonstrate British civilisation to Indigenous viewers, counter the behaviour of other colonists, and respond to Indigenous critiques of this. These mixed demands on philanthropists led to a mingled sense of weakness and a drive for authority. This helps explain the sense of thwarted longing expressed by James Günther, who wished to make his mission 'a city on a hill, in this dreary wilderness, among a savage tribe, and in the midst of a perverse generation of professing Christians'.<sup>86</sup>

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86 Günther, journal, 23 April 1838, *WVP*.