

‘We do not want one who is too old’: Aboriginal child domestic servants in late 19th and early 20th century Queensland

Shirleene Robinson

In 1997, the *Bringing them home* report of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission explored the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families in the 19th and 20th centuries.¹ It highlighted the particular interest that European officials had in Aboriginal children, as opposed to Aboriginal adults, and the way that many of these removed children were sent out from missions to perform labour for Europeans. This article further explores the way that Europeans made use of Aboriginal child workers in the 19th and 20th centuries by focusing on the field of domestic service.

Introduction

Domestic service was the principal field of employment for Aboriginal females in Queensland during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This type of labour was physically laborious, emotionally exhausting, and low-paying. Historians have explored the working lives of Aboriginal domestic servants in some detail and have revealed that these workers were oppressed by the dual categories of race and gender.² A substantial number of Aboriginal workers employed in this field were children. Previous researchers have not considered the impact that this demanding service had on these physically and emotionally immature workers. This article attempts to redress the balance by investigating the way that youth impacted on the experiences of Aboriginal children who were employed as domestic servants in late 19th and early 20th century Queensland.³

Aboriginal children were employed as domestic servants across Australia in this period. This article will focus on Queensland due to both constraints of space and the

1. National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (Australia) 1997.

2. The situation in Queensland has been explored in the following: Huggins 1987-1988; Huggins 1995 and Evans and Scott 1996. For other Australian regions see McGrath 1978; Reynolds 1990: 165-190; Hodson 1993; Sabbioni 1993; Walden 1995; and Haskins 2001. The more general position of Aboriginal children in Queensland is explored in Kidd 1997.

3. For a broader consideration of the way that the physical and emotional immaturity of Aboriginal children influenced their working experiences and related legal aspects, see Robinson 2002. Hetherington 2002 has also explored the experiences of Aboriginal child workers in WA in the 19th century.

different nuances of policy in individual states. Up to one-third of Aboriginal domestic workers in Queensland were aged less than 18 years and thus can be classified as children. Almost all of these young people were over-worked, underpaid, not given any education, and not provided with the basic necessities of life. Many of these workers suffered long-term psychological damage after their European employers denied them access to their families and traditional cultures. Furthermore, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of these young workers was commonplace. Despite the obvious power imbalance between adult European employers and Aboriginal child workers, young Aboriginal domestic servants used a variety of creative mechanisms to resist European domination. This article considers these strategies of resistance and their ultimate success or failure. Finally, it concludes that Aboriginal children employed as domestic servants in Queensland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were amongst the most vulnerable workers in the state's history.

Although it is not the intention of this article to compare the experiences of Aboriginal and European child workers in colonial Queensland, it is important to recognise that Aboriginal child workers were subject to greater oppression than their European counterparts because of their dual categorisation as both Aboriginal people and children.⁴ Both Aboriginal and European child workers occupied a vulnerable position in Queensland society due to their youth: in any relationship between children and adults, the adult controls the power-balance. Aboriginal children, however, were further subjugated because they were members of a dispossessed Indigenous community. The distress of working European children is not to be underplayed, but it is crucial to acknowledge that there were more official mechanisms in place to deal with their abuse.

Definitions and demographic observations

The demographic composition of the Aboriginal domestic service workforce in 19th and 20th century Queensland reflects broader societal understandings of the work of men and women in the region during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Domestic service was an occupation highly segregated by gender, with the great bulk of these workers being female.⁵ The composition of the Aboriginal workforce reflects this gender divide. In 1920, when the Queensland government undertook a survey of Aboriginal workers employed in the field of domestic service in the state, they found that almost all of these workers were female.⁶

It is evident that a significant proportion of these workers were also young and could be classified as children. At this point, it is necessary to explain the definition of childhood that is used in this study. Defining the age when childhood ends and adulthood begins is difficult because, as the historian Phillippe Aries has pointed out, childhood is a modern historical construction.⁷ Throughout this study, Aboriginal people under the age of 18 have been classified as children. This definition has been adopted for several reasons. In the first instance, international bodies such as the

⁴ The situation of Aboriginal and European child workers in Queensland is compared in Robinson 2002.

⁵ Matthews 1984: 65.

⁶ 'Returns of Aboriginal and Half-Caste Females in Employment in 1920' [date and in-letter no. not provided], A/58912, Queensland State Archives.

⁷ Aries 1962.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labour Organization define a child as a person under the age of 16. When referring to child labour and children performing dangerous work, however, these organisations argue that this labour is damaging to people under the age of 18. Accordingly, they classify all workers under the age of 18 as children.⁸ Secondly, recent overviews of government policies towards Indigenous people in the late 19th and early 20th centuries have also tended to demarcate people under the age of 18 as children for the purposes of their studies.⁹ This article follows their approach.

While domestic service was a demanding occupation, it is evident that a large number of Aboriginal children were employed in this capacity. According to the 1920 survey of Aboriginal domestic servants in Queensland, which was undertaken by the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, John Bleakley, more than a third of the 524 female Aboriginal domestic servants in service in the state in that year were under the age of 18.¹⁰ While statistics for the period 1842 to 1945 reveal that at least 448 Aboriginal children under the age of 18 were recorded as being employed as domestic servants, this figure is almost certainly a dramatic underestimation of the number of Aboriginal domestic servants employed in this period, as European employers were under no compulsion to register their Aboriginal employees until 1897. The Aboriginal children whose details were recorded in the late 19th and 20th centuries are likely to represent only a fraction of the overall Aboriginal child workforce.

The data available that relates to Aboriginal children employed as domestic servants in Queensland between 1842 and 1945 indicates that their average age tended to be younger in the period before the passage of the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* than in the period afterwards and until the conclusion of World War II. In the period from 1842 to 1896, the majority of Aboriginal children employed as domestic servants were aged from ten to 12 years. Europeans were certainly prepared to use young Aboriginal children as domestic servants in this period, with the youngest child listed as employed in this period being only three years of age. In the period after the passage of the 1897 Act, up until World War II, the majority of Aboriginal children employed in this capacity were aged between 12 and 14 years. While the mean age in this period tended to be older than it had been in the earlier period, there are two recorded cases of two-year-old Aboriginal girls being employed as domestic servants in this period. To the contemporary observer, the employment of these physically and emotionally immature toddlers appears bewildering and impractical. No specific information was provided on the labour tasks these children may have performed, but, based on other evidence, it is probable that they performed simple tasks such as tidying and sorting clothes. It was most likely that these children were being 'trained early' to perform heavier labour when they grew slightly older.

Australian historians, in general, have used the term 'domestic service' to describe 'the provision of household labour by paid employees rather than dependents'.¹¹ The

8. For example, Falkus et al 1997.

9. For example, Read 1982: 2 and Fabian and Loh 1980: 18.

10. 'Returns of Aboriginal and Half-Caste Females in Employment in 1920' [date and in-letter no. not provided], A/58912, Queensland State Archives.

11. Kingston in Davidson et al (eds) 1998: 192.

occupation was common among Australia's female population from the start of European settlement up until the middle of the 20th century, when improved technology and wider career options for women made domestic service virtually redundant as a paid profession.¹² The type of household labour that European domestic servants were expected to perform in Queensland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was wide-ranging and difficult. Ronald Lawson, in his study of Brisbane society in the 1890s, has explained that European domestic servants were required to wash, iron, cook, set the table, wash the dishes, care for children, make repairs, garden, and chop wood.¹³ Overwhelming evidence indicates that most domestic servants found the occupation unpleasant.

Domestic service was a demanding profession for any woman in 19th and 20th century Queensland. It was especially arduous for the majority of Aboriginal women, however, because the tasks they were expected to perform far exceeded in range those required from European domestic servants.¹⁴ As Jackie Huggins has pointed out, as far as Aboriginal workers were concerned, the term 'domestic service' was 'employed to describe any type of labour which was not related to stockwork or tasks outside the boundary of the main camp'.¹⁵ European employers expected Aboriginal domestic servants to cook, clean, and act as 'nurse-girls' to their children, just like European domestic servants, but also placed other demands upon them, including those of a sexual nature.¹⁶ Evans and Scott conclude that Aboriginal domestic servants were 'worse paid, more tightly disciplined and less well-regarded than their white counterparts'.¹⁷

European employers did not moderate the severity of labour tasks that Aboriginal children employed as domestic servants were expected to perform, including cooking, cleaning, washing, and minding their employers' children, in spite of their own youth. These tasks were physically demanding and potentially damaging to the children's physical development. There are cases of Aboriginal children employed as domestic servants being required to separate milk,¹⁸ dig post holes,¹⁹ chop the firewood, and fetch the water from the river.²⁰ One Aboriginal child, ostensibly employed as a domestic servant, was charged with keeping goats warm at night by sleeping with them.²¹

Most Aboriginal children who were employed as domestic servants were grossly overworked.²² The recollections of Aboriginal women who were employed as domestic

12. Kingston in Davidson et al (eds) 1998: 192. See also Kingston 1975: 55 and Matthews 1984: 71.

13. Lawson 1973: 135.

14. Huggins 1995: 189. McGrath 1978 also makes this point in her study of Aboriginal women workers in the Northern Territory.

15. Huggins 1987-1988: 12.

16. See, for example, Archibald Meston to the Home Secretary, 27 June 1901, in-letter 15120 of 1901, 'Aboriginals West of the Warrego', COL/143, Queensland State Archives; and R Reside, Constable, Boulia Sub-District, to the Home Secretary, 10 December 1898, in-letter 7341 of 1898, COL/143, Queensland State Archives. Also explored in detail in Evans 1982: 6-21.

17. Evans and Scott 1996: 140. Jennifer Sabbioni makes a similar point regarding the experiences of Aboriginal domestic servants in Western Australia in Sabbioni 1993: 7-29.

18. Kennedy 1985: 22.

19. Rosser 1985: 53.

20. Vogan 1890: 227.

21. King 1996: 199.

22. This generally holds true for Aboriginal adults as well. See Blake 1987: 53.

servants in their childhood illustrate the great quantity of work these children were expected to undertake. These tasks were so onerous and demanding that Rita Huggins, who was employed in her youth as a domestic servant, has asked whether this employment was 'servitude or slavery?'²³ Huggins remembers being expected to work from dawn until the late evening: cleaning, washing, ironing, preparing food, and caring for her employer's children.²⁴ Marnie Kennedy, who also worked as a domestic servant as a young girl, had a similar experience. She recalls the breakfast bell waking her at 4:00am, after which she had to spend the day setting and waiting on the table, cleaning the large dining room and lounge, doing the washing and ironing for up to eight people and then working in the dairy.²⁵ Eve Mumewa Fesl has described how her mother, who was employed as a child, had to scrub floors and wash clothes for a family of five.²⁶ Ruth Hegarty, who worked as young domestic servant, began work at 5:30am, before the family she worked for had risen, and did not retire for the evening until they had all gone to bed.²⁷ A typical day would see her starting a fire in the wood stove in the morning, preparing breakfast, emptying chamber-pots, preparing morning tea, afternoon tea and dinner, and washing up and setting the stove in preparation for the following day.²⁸ She said, 'I had never before in my short life worked that hard.'²⁹ Wayne King's mother was ostensibly employed as a domestic servant but had to help on the farm as well. She recalls, 'Boy, was that hard work!'³⁰

The childcare aspect of domestic service was particularly stressful for Aboriginal children, who were often not much older than the European children they were caring for. Rita Huggins remembers that her employer's children were often cheeky to her, yet she was not permitted to discipline them in any way.³¹ Despite the stressful nature of childcare work, government officials argued that young Aboriginal girls were particularly suited to this responsibility. In 1908, the Chief Protector of Aboriginals wrote that Aboriginal girls under the age of 12 'cannot be of much use to people' unless 'to amuse and take care of children'.³² Employers also believed that Aboriginal children were particularly adept at performing childcare work. There are numerous examples of settlers writing to government officials asking specifically for young Aboriginal children to perform this type of labour. In 1908, one potential employer wrote to the Superintendent of Barambah Aboriginal settlement, asking for a young Aboriginal nursemaid. He emphasised that 'we do not want one who is too old as she may not take to the children'.³³ His request must have been unsuccessful because he wrote to the Chief Protector of Aborigi-

23. Huggins and Huggins 1994: 33-47.

24. Huggins and Huggins 1994: 37.

25. Kennedy 1985: 22.

26. Fesl 1993: 111.

27. Hegarty 1999: 104-105.

28. Hegarty 1999: 104-105.

29. Hegarty 1999: 104-105.

30. King 1996: 201.

31. Huggins and Huggins 1994: 37.

32. Chief Protector of Aboriginals to the Under Secretary, Home Office, 20 August 1908, in-letter 09830 of 1908, HOM/J38, Queensland State Archives.

33. A. B. Osbourne to the Superintendent, Baramabah settlement, 21 October 1914, in-letter 03024 of 1914, A/69461, Queensland State Archives.

nals again a few months later wanting 'any little girl about twelve or fourteen years of age ... to mind the baby and make herself useful around the house'.³⁴

Injuries

Poorly kept records make it impossible to detail the number of injuries that Aboriginal children working as domestic servants sustained through the course of their employment. Hospital records available for the late 19th and 20th centuries do indicate that a number of Aboriginal children employed as domestic servants were admitted needing medical attention.³⁵ Unfortunately, these records only specify the occupation and age of the child and not the cause of their stay in hospital. Nellie, aged seven and described as a domestic servant from the Batavia River region, was admitted for two weeks in 1891.³⁶ Topsy, aged ten from Cooktown, was described as a domestic and was admitted to the hospital for two months from November 1892 to January 1893.³⁷ Kitty, aged ten, was described as a nursemaid and only stayed in the hospital for one day in 1893.³⁸ Another child, also called Topsy, was described as a general servant and was hospitalised for three days in 1899.³⁹ There are two recorded instances of Aboriginal children who had worked as domestic servants dying in hospital. One of these children, Annie, was aged 16 and had worked as a domestic servant in Cooktown. She died in 1892 after spending 11 days in the Cooktown Hospital. The other child, Rosie, a girl aged about 12, had worked as a domestic servant for a member of the police force. She died in 1896 after a month in hospital.⁴⁰ Neither of these children had the causes of their death recorded.

'We cannot procure sufficient girls to meet the demands': the popularity of Aboriginal child domestic servants

The demand for young Aboriginal domestic servants was high throughout the period from 1842 to 1945. Indeed, after the passage of the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act of 1897*, which forced the majority of Queensland's Aboriginal population onto missions and reserves, government officials viewed domestic service as the only suitable occupation for young Aboriginal women.⁴¹ Consequently, these institutions focused on training Aboriginal girls to perform this type of employment and served as labour depots where Europeans could procure young Aboriginal workers.⁴² The demand

34. A. B. Osbourne to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, 21 October 1914, in-letter 03024 of 1914, A/69461, Queensland State Archives.

35. For example, Cook Hospital Board, Admissions Registers, Cooktown Hospital, HOS 13/23-32 [dates not provided], Queensland State Archives.

36. Cook Hospital Board, Admissions Registers, Cooktown Hospital, HOS 13/17, 30 September 1890-24 July 1891, Queensland State Archives.

37. Cook Hospital Board, Admissions Registers, Cooktown Hospital, HOS 13/19, 27 July 1892-8 August 1893, Queensland State Archives.

38. Cook Hospital Board, Admissions Registers, Cooktown Hospital, HOS 13/19, 27 July 1892-8 August 1893, Queensland State Archives.

39. Cook Hospital Board, Admissions Registers, Cooktown Hospital, HOS 13/23-32 [dates not provided], Queensland State Archives.

40. Cook Hospital Board, Admissions Registers, Cooktown Hospital, HOS 13/20, 9 August 1893-26 December 1894, Queensland State Archives.

41. Evans and Scott 1996.

42. Robinson 2003: 172-236.

for young Aboriginal domestic servants was so great throughout this era, however, that missions and reserves could never entirely satisfy the requests for these workers.

While no official statistics were collated for most of this period, there is much evidence that European employers were eager to engage these young servants. An example of how early in the occupation of a region this employment was accepted without question can be found in an 1852 *Moreton Bay Courier* article. Published only one decade after the commencement of free settlement in the Moreton Bay District, the article mentions that an Aboriginal girl at Maryborough, aged about eight or nine years, who had been employed as a house-maid and nurse-girl, had witnessed a murder.⁴³ It is noteworthy that the employment of this young Aboriginal child in this capacity was not considered sufficiently unusual to warrant further comment.

As the British pushed into the northern reaches of the state, they started employing increasing numbers of Aboriginal children as domestic servants. When the English writer Anthony Trollope toured Queensland in the 1870s, he observed that numerous settlers were using young Aboriginal girls as domestic servants.⁴⁴ By the 1880s, such employment had become commonplace. By the 1890s, when the Queensland government finally turned its attentions towards the employment of Aboriginal people in the colony, official records reveal that settlers had become highly dependent on the labour provided by these young domestic servants.⁴⁵

Europeans continued to use large numbers of young Aboriginal domestic servants as the 20th century began. The state government aided this demand by purchasing a house in West End, a suburb of Brisbane, to act as a receiving depot for Aboriginal domestic servants from all over Queensland.⁴⁶ Officials such as Archibald Meston were happy to send Aboriginal girls as young as five years of age to this home to be trained as domestic servants.⁴⁷ In 1906, Richard Howard, the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, commented on the high demand for Aboriginal domestic servants, explaining that it was 'so much in excess of the supply, that although the settlements at Barambah and Deebing Creek Mission have been drawn upon to their utmost extent, places could be

43. *Moreton Bay Courier*, 22 May 1852: 2.

44. Trollope 1873: 72.

45. Government records provide the details of many Aboriginal children employed as domestic servants in the 1890s. See for example: H Willett to the Colonial Secretary, 22 April 1890, in-letter 3375 of 1890, COL/A613, Queensland State Archives; James Dempsey to the Home Secretary, 2 October 1902, in-letter 18761 of 1902, A/58927, Queensland State Archives; and Walter Roth to the Under Secretary, Lands Department, 5 March 1902, in-letter 2956 of 1903, 'Dr Roth's Progress Report, February 1903', A/44681, Queensland State Archives.

46. Archibald Meston to the Home Secretary, 22 October 1902, in-letter 16189 of 1902, COL/144, Queensland State Archives. The Aboriginal Girls Home at West End was opened in 1899 and was finally closed in 1905, following an incident where the Protectress of Aboriginals, Mrs Frew, was believed to have misappropriated funds belonging to Aboriginal workers. The Home had an unpleasant reputation while it was in operation. In 1901, Archibald Meston informed the Under Secretary, Home Office, that 'the Home, under the present Matron, is regarded as a jail and she herself as a very unsympathetic jailer.' See Archibald Meston to the Under Secretary, Home Office, 25 February 1901, in-letter 03291 of 1901, COL/145, Queensland State Archives.

47. See for example, Archibald Meston to the Under Secretary, Home Office, 23 October 1901, in-letter 16807 of 1901, COL/145, Queensland State Archives.

found for quite double the number'.⁴⁸ In 1911, Bleakley, Howard's replacement as Chief Protector of Aboriginals, made a similar observation, informing one settler that 'the matter of obtaining Aboriginal girls for domestic service from this department is always uncertain, as the applications for them are so numerous we cannot procure sufficient girls to meet the demands'.⁴⁹

During World War I, Queenslanders continued to make heavy use of young Aboriginal domestic servants.⁵⁰ Evans and Scott have ably demonstrated that the demand for these servants continued unabated throughout the period between World Wars I and II.⁵¹ In 1924, W Porteous Semple, the superintendent of Barambah reserve, acknowledged the demand for Aboriginal domestic servants by commenting that he had no trouble finding employment situations for these workers, as 'for domestic labour there is always a good demand'.⁵²

This good demand for young Aboriginal domestic servants can be explained by the fact that these servants eased the responsibilities and workload of European settlers in Queensland during the period considered. Dawn May has explained that European employers benefited from using Aboriginal domestic workers in 19th century Queensland because they were versatile, produced a high quality of workmanship, and provided European women with invaluable assistance.⁵³ Correspondence from employers confirms that Aboriginal children provided them with valuable assistance in the domestic sphere. In 1917, one employer wrote to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, informing him that the 13-year-old Aboriginal girl she had engaged as a domestic servant 'was such a help to me looking after the children' and that her little child loved the Aboriginal girl.⁵⁴

'Something like slavery'? The costs of Aboriginal child labour

While Europeans benefited enormously from the use of Aboriginal children as domestic servants, the performance of this labour took an equally enormous toll on the lives of these young servants. In fact, when the experiences of these young workers are considered as a whole, parallels can be drawn between their working situations and slavery.⁵⁵ This is a highly complex issue, as there is much conjecture over the precise conditions that constitute slavery. The sociologist Orlando Patterson has convincingly argued that

48. 'Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for 1906', *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* 1907 2: 1264.

49. Chief Protector of Aboriginals to JA Chauvel, *Summerlands*, Harrisville, 14 February 1911, in-letter 350 of 1911, A/58665, Queensland State Archives.

50. See for example, 'Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for the year 1917', *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* 1918 1: 1673. and 'Aboriginals Department - Information Contained in Report for the Year Ended 31 December 1918', *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*, 1919-1920 2: 535.

51. Evans and Scott 1996: 140-157.

52. W Porteous Semple, Barambah Settlement, to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Brisbane, 1 September 1924, in-letter 2677 of 1924, HOM/J539, Queensland State Archives.

53. May 1983: 84.

54. Mary McKinley to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, 23 January 1917, in-letter 00341 of 1917, A/69776, Queensland State Archives.

55. For extensive discussion on the theoretical foundations of classifying Aboriginal workers as slaves, see Evans 1999: 169-170 and Robinson 2002.

it is not adequate to define slavery as the legal ownership of human beings.⁵⁶ He maintains that this definition is too simplistic, as it does not take into account the complexity of slavery as a historical condition of substantial power imbalances.⁵⁷ If Patterson's definition is adopted, Aboriginal child domestic servants, dominated by their European employers and usually unable to control their own working lives, occupied a position recognisable as slavery.⁵⁸

Aboriginal child workers in the field of domestic service were placed in a slave-type situation not only because of their age and gender, but also because they had little protection against abuse. In theory, European settlers who employed Aboriginal children were required to hold a permit issued by the required Protector of Aboriginals or Chief Protector of Aboriginals to do so, which was renewable each year.⁵⁹ In practice, however, many employers of Aboriginal child domestic servants were either not issued with permits by local Protectors of Aboriginals, or they were granted permits to employ Aboriginal children as domestic servants indefinitely. This meant that employers in Queensland were able to exercise unchallenged control over their Aboriginal child domestic servants throughout this period. In 1904, Roth commented that one employer at Cooktown had been allowed to employ two Aboriginal children, one boy about four years old and one girl about seven years old, as domestic servants without permits being issued.⁶⁰ Protectors of Aboriginals often trapped Aboriginal children in unhappy employment situations with no means of leaving by issuing employment permits which were meant to stand *ad infinitum*. In 1881, Emily, a ten-year-old girl, was ordered by government officials to remain in service with a European family 'indefinitely'.⁶¹ In another case, in 1905, a Protector of Aboriginals issued an indefinite permit for the employment of a girl who was aged ten, but who did 'not look more than seven or eight'.⁶² This meant that the employer did not have to renew his permit annually and consequently that the child's situation was in no way monitored.

The issue of wages

There is little evidence to suggest that child labourers received remuneration for their work. Many young Aboriginal domestic servants were either paid poorly or were not paid at all. This was the case for Aboriginal women as well as Aboriginal children.⁶³ As late as 1901, Archibald Meston noted that almost all Aboriginal domestic servants in the state were not being paid for their labour.⁶⁴ Until an Amendment Act to the *Aboriginals*

56. Patterson 1982: 21.

57. Patterson 1982: 1.

58. Robinson 2003: 7–16.

59. 'Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for 1904', *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* 1905 1: 750.

60. Walter Roth to the Under Secretary, Public Lands, 23 January 1904, in-letter 02068 of 1904, A/58750, Queensland State Archives.

61. [in-letter no. and date not provided], 1881, Police Station Noosa, Watchhouse Charge Book, 18 March 1878–26 December 1934, QS 519/1, Queensland State Archives.

62. Protector of Aboriginals, Bowen, to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Brisbane, 10 August 1905, in-letter 1696 of 1905, A/58729, Queensland State Archives.

63. Evans, Saunders and Cronin 1975: 143.

64. Archibald Meston to the Home Secretary, 27 June 1901, in-letter 15120 of 1901, 'Aboriginals West of the Warrego', COL/143, Queensland State Archives.

Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897 was drafted in 1901, the Queensland government could not legally compel European employers to pay wages to Aboriginal child workers.⁶⁵ In effect, this meant that for the first 60 years after free settlement in the Moreton Bay District these young workers had no legal guarantee that they would receive wages.

Even after the passage of the 1901 Amending Act and the provision of a suggested scale of wages for Aboriginal children by the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Walter Roth, in 1904,⁶⁶ the enormous control that European adults had over Aboriginal children meant that in many cases these employers were able to avoid paying them wages. In one example, which came to Roth's attention in 1902, an Aboriginal girl had worked for a European employer at Normanton as a domestic servant for ten years, since the age of three, without receiving any wages.⁶⁷ That same year, the Southern Protector of Aboriginals, Archibald Meston, drew the attention of the Under Secretary to another case where a 14-year-old Aboriginal girl had worked for two years as a domestic servant without receiving wages.⁶⁸ Cases such as these continued throughout the first half of the 20th century. In 1917, Bleakley, who was then the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, became aware of another case where an Aboriginal girl, aged about 18, had lived with a European family all her life, had performed 'a good deal of work in the house' and had looked after her employers' children, yet had never received any wages.⁶⁹ In another case, which came to official attention in 1937, a 15-year-old Aboriginal girl received only 16 months worth of wages, yet had worked as a domestic servant for the previous nine years.⁷⁰

In some instances, European employers were able to avoid paying wages to young Aboriginal domestic servants with the approval of the Queensland government. In 1898, Archibald Meston, who was then the Southern Protector of Aboriginals, allowed one European employer to use a five-and-a-half year old Aboriginal girl as a domestic servant without paying wages.⁷¹ Again, in 1904, government officials sanctioned the decision of one employer to avoid paying his young Aboriginal domestic servant any wages until she turned 11-and-a-half because she would supposedly 'not be of much use' until then.⁷²

65. 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals for 1900', *Queensland Votes and Proceedings* 1901 4: 1337.

66. Walter Roth to the Home Secretary, 23 May 1904, in-letter 16262 of 1904, A/58927, Queensland State Archives.

67. 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals for 1902', *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* 1903 2: 461.

68. Archibald Meston to the Under Secretary, 11 January 1902, in-letter 00532 of 1902, COL/144, Queensland State Archives.

69. Protector of Aboriginals, Cloncurry, to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Brisbane, 4 April 1917, in-letter 12610 of 1917, POL/J15, Queensland State Archives.

70. EK Thompson to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, 15 March 1927, in-letter 16807 of 1901, COL/145, Queensland State Archives.

71. Archibald Meston to the Under Secretary, 23 October 1901, in-letter 16907 of 1901, COL.145, Queensland State Archives.

72. Acting Chief Protector of Aboriginals to the Home Secretary, 4 November 1904, in-letter 34418 of 1904, 'Acting Chief Protector of Aboriginals: Progress Report. October 1904', A/44681, Queensland State Archives.

Even when Aboriginal children did receive wages, they were not proportionate to the amount of work they were required to undertake. Queensland government officials suggested that Aboriginal children should receive lower wages than other workers, right from the first attempts to set optional scales of wages. In 1902, Protector Galbraith suggested that Aboriginal girls under the age of 12 who were employed by Europeans should receive only two shillings and six pence per week. Galbraith suggested a higher rate of pay, five shillings per week, for Aboriginal domestic servants over the age of 12.⁷³ This was still less than adult European domestic servants were able to command: in Queensland, the average adult European domestic servant was receiving ten shillings per week as early as 1893.⁷⁴

Queensland's various Chief Protectors of Aboriginals did not adhere to a particular rate of pay for young Aboriginal domestic servants and were often prepared to accept low wages for these children. In 1908, six years after Galbraith had suggested that Aboriginal children employed as domestic servants should receive two shillings and six pence per week, Aboriginal children were being legally employed as domestic servants in the state for as little as one shilling and three pence per week.⁷⁵ Even when Aboriginal girls were receiving the suggested two shillings and six pence per week, officials admitted that European domestic servants would receive wages at least four times as high for the same work.⁷⁶

Educational issues

Most Aboriginal children who were employed as domestic servants did not receive any education. This directly contravened the *Education Act* of 1875, which was meant to cover Aboriginal as well as European children.⁷⁷ In 1905, Walter Roth commented on this, remarking that, legally, employers were the guardians of Aboriginal children and were obliged to send them to school.⁷⁸ In practice, however, this very rarely occurred because the government supervision over these children was 'imperfect'.⁷⁹ Evidence indicates that Roth was right to suspect that employers were not sending their young domestic servants to school or teaching them to read or write.⁸⁰ Indeed, out of all of the records that were kept by government officials, only two cases were found where European employers sent their young Aboriginal domestic servants to school.⁸¹ Official correspondence shows that one of these children, a ten-year-old girl, did very well aca-

73. 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals for 1901', *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* 1902 1: 1138.

74. Thorpe 1996: 177.

75. Mrs R Joseph, Sandgate, to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Brisbane, 24 August 1908 [in-letter no. not provided], A/69461, Queensland State Archives.

76. Frances Meston to the Under Secretary and Home Secretary, 15 January 1900, in-letter 00679 of 1900, A/58929, Queensland State Archives.

77. Crown Solicitor to the Home Secretary, 17 February 1903, in-letter 20373 of 1903, A/58927, Queensland State Archives.

78. Although this article does not have the space to fully consider the issue of 'guardianship', it is a highly important topic. See Haebich 2000.

79. Haebich 2000.

80. See, for example, 'Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for 1904': 758.

81. Archibald Meston to the Under Secretary, Home Office, 23 October 1901, in-letter 16807 of 1901, COL/145, Queensland State Archives.

demically at Normanton state school.⁸² The other child however, was removed from her domestic service position and school at the age of nine, after three-and-a-half years of service, when her employer became ill. She was then taken to the Aboriginal girls home at West End in Brisbane to await a further position.⁸³

'Scraps for dinner': food and other necessities

Young Aboriginal girls employed as domestic servants frequently did not even receive life's basic essentials in their places of work.⁸⁴ Fesl describes how her mother was told that 'fruit is good for little girls, therefore when you are hungry, you can climb up and eat some mangoes from the tree',⁸⁵ and this was the only food that the child received. Wayne King's mother remembers that she was only permitted to eat the scraps from the breakfast table. She questions why she was considered 'good enough' to perform hard labour but not 'good enough' to be fed properly?⁸⁶ Agnes Williams, who began working as a domestic servant at 13 years of age, told Jackie Huggins that she had 'food rations and bread and dripping' occasionally during the day and 'scraps' for dinner.⁸⁷

There are also many cases of Aboriginal girls who were employed as domestic servants not receiving adequate clothing. Fesl's mother was made to wear old clothes that she stitched together from her European employer's cast-offs.⁸⁸ In 1902, Archibald Meston commented on this endemic flaw in the system when he described how one 14-year-old Aboriginal domestic servant had not received any wages for two years of labour and had 'not even clothing fit to be seen in the streets'.⁸⁹

'You were always the Aboriginal servant': emotional abuse and exclusion

Loneliness often accompanied material deprivation.⁹⁰ Employers caused young Aboriginal servants to feel emotionally isolated by treating them as inferiors and by preventing them from having contact with other Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture.⁹¹ When Agnes Williams' mother died, her male employer prevented her from attending the funeral, telling her that 'he didn't see any reason' for her to go home.⁹² While Aboriginal children were frequently prevented from having contact with their own families, they were rarely accepted by European families. Roth realised very early on that Aboriginal children who were employed as domestic servants were never

^{82.} Mrs Colless to Archibald Meston, 29 October 1903, in-letter 1454 of 1903, COL/145, Queensland State Archives.

^{83.} Archibald Meston to the Under Secretary, Home Office, 23 October 1901, in-letter 16807 of 1901, COL/145, Queensland State Archives.

^{84.} Huggins mentions that this was also the case for adult Aboriginal domestic servants in Huggins 1987-1988: 9.

^{85.} Fesl 1993: 111.

^{86.} King 1996: 201.

^{87.} Huggins 1991: 1.

^{88.} Fesl 1993: 111.

^{89.} Archibald Meston to the Under Secretary, Home Office, 11 January 1902, in-letter 00532 of 1902, COL/144, Queensland State Archives.

^{90.} Sally Hodson has made a similar point about the experiences of young Aboriginal domestic servants in Western Australia. See Hodson 1993: 77.

^{91.} These issues were also explored in the 1997 *Bringing them home* inquiry.

^{92.} Huggins 1991: 1.

accepted as equals by their European employers. In 1901, he wrote that these Aboriginal child workers were:

brought up in a false position as 'one of the family' [until] the time arrives sooner or later when the true-blooded or half-caste girl realises that she is a pariah amongst those very people with whom, probably ever since she can remember, she has associated with more or less as an equal. Is it matter for wonder that such should finally end badly?⁹³

While loneliness and isolation were common themes mentioned in correspondence relating to these workers, Queensland's longest serving Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Bleakley, still expressed surprise in 1915 when one young Aboriginal domestic servant left her position and walked a long distance because she felt so isolated.⁹⁴

Aboriginal children who were employed as domestic servants also experienced great loneliness because their employers would not let them associate with other Aboriginal people. The great degree of misery that these children would have experienced as a result of their isolation from their family and traditional associations is almost unimaginable. In 1901, Archibald Meston observed that it was a common practice in the western districts of Queensland to prevent Aboriginal domestic servants from socialising with other Aboriginal people: he reported that many Aboriginal domestic servants were being 'locked-up at night to keep them from their own people'.⁹⁵ In 1904, Protector Galbraith informed Roth that many stations in the Normanton area did not let their Aboriginal domestic servants, most of whom had started work at the age of seven, associate with other Aboriginal people.⁹⁶ Again, many Europeans did not accept that Aboriginal children had the same bonds of kinship and emotional requirements that European children did. Even in those rare cases when employers recognised the emotional requirements of their Aboriginal child workers, it seems they were usually more concerned with their own agendas than easing the loneliness of these young workers.

Employers greatly exacerbated the depressing situation of young Aboriginal domestic servants by treating them as inferiors.⁹⁷ The supposed lowliness of these young workers was constantly reiterated. Even the act of taking meals constantly reinforced the distinction between young Aboriginal domestic servants and their employers. Rita Huggins remembers that 'at the end of the day we'd have to eat in separate rooms out of sight of the family'.⁹⁸ Wayne King's mother has also described how inescapable the division between young Aboriginal domestic servants and their European employers was in daily working life. She recalls:

93. 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals for 1900', *Queensland Votes and Proceedings* 1901 4: 1337.

94. Protector of Aboriginals, Charleville, to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Brisbane, 9 September 1915, in-letter 02765 of 1915, A/58666, Queensland State Archives.

95. Archibald Meston to the Home Secretary, 27 June 1901, in-letter 151201 of 1901, 'Aboriginals West of the Warrego', COL/143, Queensland State Archives.

96. Protector Galbraith, Normanton, to Walter Roth, Northern Protector of Aboriginals, 30 January 1904, in-letter 226 of 1904, A/44680, Queensland State Archives.

97. Huggins 1987-1988: 8-9.

98. Huggins and Huggins 1994: 38.

You were always the Aboriginal servant. I wasn't allowed to walk through the house to get to my room at the back of the house; I always had to use the back entrance. My meals had to be taken separately on a table on the back verandah.⁹⁹

Ruth Hegarty describes a similar experience, remembering that 'I was never allowed to forget where I came from or how untrained I was, both domestically and educationally'.¹⁰⁰ Agnes Williams recalls that she 'was a servant and was treated like shit'.¹⁰¹

'I did not know what the thrashing was for': the issue of physical abuse

While many Aboriginal children were overworked, underpaid, lonely, and not given an education, a similarly high proportion of these workers were also physically abused by their European employers. Their youth and size meant that they were vulnerable to such abuse and were powerless to prevent it. Harold Meston described one case of physical abuse in 1900; this case was somewhat unusual because the abused child was able to give an account of her treatment. The incident had come to official attention due to the actions of a Mrs EA Salisbury, who had been staying at a Toowoomba boarding house when she observed the 'cruel way' that a European employer, Mrs Boyce, treated her ten-year-old Aboriginal domestic servant, Gerribah. Mrs Salisbury wrote to government officials, informing them that she knew that Mrs Boyce had, 'on one occasion, given [Gerribah] twenty-eighty lashes with a dog whip and 'used to kick her around''.¹⁰²

Mrs Salisbury's complaint led to Harold Meston investigating the case further. Meston interviewed several other European witnesses and Gerribah herself. Gerribah told him that she had been with Mrs Boyce for a long time and used to do housework for her and mind her two young children. She was not paid for this labour. Furthermore, Gerribah described:

Mrs. Boyce used to thrash me with a riding whip, and hit me in the face. Sometimes I was thrashed because I forgot to do something Mrs. Boyce told me to do and sometimes I did not know what the thrashing was for.¹⁰³

Further evidence revealed that Mrs Boyce's husband had also kicked the child. Meston told his superiors that when he had asked Gerribah if she was willing to leave her situation with Mrs Boyce, she 'promptly answered with a very emphatic "yes!"'.¹⁰⁴ Gerribah herself, as a powerless young child, had been unable to leave her abusive situation.

Many similar cases of physical abuse were recorded. In 1907, the *Winton Herald* newspaper reported another disturbing case where a seven-year-old Aboriginal child, Alice, had been repeatedly abused physically and emotionally by her employer, Mrs Walsh.¹⁰⁵ The case had come to public attention because Mrs Walsh's neighbour, Timothy Scanlon, had heard the child being beaten for one-and-a-half hours and had

⁹⁹. King 1996: 201.

¹⁰⁰. Hegarty 1999: 113.

¹⁰¹. Huggins 1991: 1.

¹⁰². Mrs EA Salisbury to Archibald Meston, 7 March 1900, in-letter 03622 of 1900, COL/140, Queensland State Archives.

¹⁰³. H. Meston to the Under Secretary and the Colonial Secretary, 9 March 1900, in-letter 03622 of 1900, COL/140, Queensland State Archives.

¹⁰⁴. H. Meston to the Under Secretary and Colonial Secretary, 9 March 1900, in-letter 03622 of 1900, COL/140, Queensland State Archives.

¹⁰⁵. *Winton Herald*, 8 April 1907: 3.

later seen the child standing outside in the sun with no shade and her hands tied behind her back. He had considered the treatment to be cruel and informed the *Winton Herald* of the case; he also stated that he knew the girl had been abused in a similar manner several times previously.

This case received considerable publicity and this led to the local police charging Mrs Walsh with assault. During the court case, further details of the appalling treatment the young girl had experienced were revealed. As a domestic servant, Alice had been expected to 'wash-up the crockery, brush down the stove, take the ashes out, sweep the kitchen and brush the floor' without receiving any wages. The child suffered emotional abuse, with Mrs Walsh telling her that her mother was 'alive; she was down in hell'. Mrs Walsh had physically abused the child in numerous ways and a doctor told the court that the child was covered with at least 30 elongated scars. Testimony from witnesses revealed that Mrs Walsh had beaten Alice with a cane, had placed the child's hand on a hot stove which 'burned her right hand which was very sore', tied her hands behind her back when she was 'bold', and made her stand in the hot sun without any shade with her sore hands still tied behind her back. Alice appeared before the court with 'scars, bruises, cuts and sores', 'all over her face, hands and body'. After her court appearance, Alice was sent to the Winton Hospital, where she remained for more than a week. As a result of the court case, Mrs Walsh was fined the maximum available amount of 20 pounds. Alice was charged as a neglected child and was sent to an industrial school.¹⁰⁶

'Not adequately protected'? The prevalence of sexual abuse

Many Aboriginal children who worked as domestic servants suffered from sexual abuse, as well as physical and emotional abuse; this would have caused immense psychological trauma. The prevalence of sexual abuse has been noted by the historians Henry Reynolds and Anna Haebich who have explained that this was a real risk for Aboriginal girls employed in Queensland's past.¹⁰⁷ During the first half of the 20th century, government officials became conscious of this fact, yet no adequate measures were taken to protect the girls. In 1922, the Reverend J McCormack, from Murgon settlement, wrote to the Home Secretary complaining about this official apathy, asserting that 'the black girl is not adequately protected when she leaves the settlement and goes out to work amongst white children'.¹⁰⁸

There are countless cases of Aboriginal girls being sexually abused while in service. Aside from the obvious psychological damage this would have caused, these children were often also infected with sexually transmitted diseases by their employers. Roth's 1900 report mentioned several cases of young Aboriginal domestic servants 'who had been tampered with' and were subsequently suffering from venereal disease.¹⁰⁹ Aboriginal girls on missions were justifiably frightened of being sent out as domestic servants because they were aware that sexual abuse was rampant. Wayne King's mother remembers that this was a real concern: she described the experience of

^{106.} *Winton Herald*, 8 April 1907: 3.

^{107.} Reynolds 1990: 179 and Haebich 2000: 301.

^{108.} RW Shand, Murgon, to J. McCormack, Home Secretary, 29 May 1922, in-letter 04646 of 1922, HOM/J431, Queensland State Archives.

^{109.} 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aborigines for 1900', *Queensland Votes and Proceedings* 1901 4(2): 1336.

one girl who had been sent out to help a local clergyman while his wife was in hospital. The clergyman raped the girl three times on the way to his farm. The girl knew that her complaints would not be believed by government officials and as a result only told other residents of the mission, including King's mother, of the abuse she had experienced.¹¹⁰ Agnes Williams told Jackie Huggins that every male employer she had ever worked for had sexually propositioned her and that European females did not believe her complaints about this behaviour.¹¹¹

Large numbers of Aboriginal children also became pregnant after this abuse. However there are no recorded instances of employers taking responsibility for these pregnant girls. Instead, young, pregnant Aboriginal girls were abandoned by their employers.¹¹² For example, one child began employment as a domestic servant at the age of ten. Four years later, her female employer informed Roth that the child was pregnant and that she no longer wanted her, asking instead for the child to be removed to a mission.¹¹³

High-ranking officials also knew that Aboriginal girls out in service were vulnerable to sexual abuse. In 1924, Governor Leslie Wilson commented that a large number of Aboriginal domestic servants were falling pregnant while in service. Wilson informed the Deputy Premier that 95% of the young girls who were sent out to domestic service from Queensland's Aboriginal missions and reserves were returning to these institutions pregnant.¹¹⁴ The Deputy Premier, however, took no notice of Wilson's letter.

Resistance

While the Aboriginal children who were employed as domestic servants in Queensland between 1842 and 1945 unquestionably occupied a powerless position, it is important to note that they did not just passively accept mistreatment by their European employers. Although their age and physical vulnerability significantly impeded their ability to resist their slave-like situation, it is important to recognise that these children still tried to resist the dominance of their European employers. This was more the case for older Aboriginal children than younger children. Younger children were probably not physically or emotionally developed enough to formulate strategies of resistance or to challenge the authority of their European employers.

Aboriginal child domestic servants generally used passive rather than violent strategies against their European employers. Their age and social position would almost certainly have prevented them from engaging in more violent means of resistance. It appears that the majority of Aboriginal children who resisted their employment as domestic servants opted to run away from their situations; this action was also probably related to the children's desire to reunite with their families. There is also evidence

¹¹⁰. King 1996: 199.

¹¹¹. Huggins 1991: 2.

¹¹². For example, Walter Roth to the Under Secretary, Public Lands Department, 5 March 1903, in-letter 2956 of 1903, 'Dr Roth's Progress Report. February 1903', A/44681, Queensland State Archives.

¹¹³. Walter Roth to the Under Secretary, Public Lands Department, 3 September 1901, in-letter 1461 of 1901, 'Dr Roth's Progress Report. August 1901', A/44679, Queensland State Archives.

¹¹⁴. Governor Leslie Wilson to the Deputy Premier, 6 June 1934, in-letter 5048 of 1934, A/3699, Queensland State Archives.

that Aboriginal domestic servants showed their resistance through mechanisms that included stealing, 'playing up', and destroying their employers' property.

In the 1870s, as he travelled through Queensland, Anthony Trollope noted the frequency with which Aboriginal child domestic servants ran away from employment. He observed that these children were running away almost as soon as they were physically able to do so.¹¹⁵ Trollope commented that the success rate of this strategy of resistance was not high. To illustrate this point, he described the situation of one particular 14-year-old girl, who had 'made repeated attempts at escape' but was recovered by Aboriginal trackers and taken back to her European employer.¹¹⁶ He used the terminology of 'slave' to illustrate the powerless situation of the child.

Most employers did not benignly accept their young Aboriginal domestic servants running away, but rather, went to considerable lengths to recapture them. They frequently enlisted the local police to help find these children. In one such case, in 1901, three Aboriginal children were taken from Nocundra in western Queensland to the Aboriginal Girls Home at West End to be trained as domestic servants. One of these children, Ruby, ran away from the Home and got as far as Chinchilla before the police captured her and took her back to the Home at West End.¹¹⁷ There are some cases where Aboriginal children who ran away from domestic service positions were given the opportunity to discuss what had prompted their actions. Invariably, they mentioned that their actions were prompted by their desire to leave exploitative and abusive employment situations.¹¹⁸

There are cases of Aboriginal children resisting domestic service positions where they were unhappy by stealing from their employers. For example, in 1902, Roth reported a situation where Lena, a 'little' Aboriginal child employed as a domestic servant at Normanton, was removed to Mapoon Aboriginal mission after she stole 15 shillings from her employer and gave it to local Aboriginal people.¹¹⁹ This strategy of resistance by stealing appears to have been quite successful because it resulted in the removal of its young practitioners from abusive situations.¹²⁰ It is important to be aware, however, that employers almost certainly directed violence towards Aboriginal children who engaged in this practice.

Aboriginal children often 'played up' to express their unhappiness with their employment as domestic servants. This mechanism of resistance could be quite successful as it resulted in many Aboriginal children being removed from their employment situations and sent to missions. In 1901 alone, Roth was able to describe several such cases. In one situation, an Aboriginal girl, Maria, aged about 13, 'knew a great deal of housework', but due to the fact that she was 'slipping out at night' and was 'playing up'

¹¹⁵ Trollope 1873: 72.

¹¹⁶ Trollope 1873: 73.

¹¹⁷ Archibald Meston to the Under Secretary, Home Office, 14 February 1901, in-letter 02644 of 1901, COL/145, Queensland State Archives.

¹¹⁸ Denis Keane, Police Station, Bowen, Kennedy District, to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Brisbane, 28 April 1907, in-letter no. 859 of 1907, A/58751, Queensland State Archives.

¹¹⁹ 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals for 1902': 462.

¹²⁰ For example, 8 July 1916 [in-letter no. not provided], Police Station, Atherton, Watchhouse Charge Books, QS629/1/1 (1), Queensland State Archives.

in other ways, her employer no longer wanted her. She was sent to Yarrabah Aboriginal mission.¹²¹ Similar to stealing, this resistance mechanism could be quite successful; however, it is again almost certain that European employers directed violence towards Aboriginal children who resisted their dominance in this way.

Aboriginal children also resisted exploitative and abusive domestic situations by destroying property belonging to their European employers. In one case, which occurred in the Brisbane suburb of Oxley in 1903, Mulla, an Aboriginal girl who was then aged about 14, set fire to her employer's curtains. At the time that this incident occurred, Mrs Sturmpels, Mulla's employer, did not suspect her. Later, however, Mulla told police officers that she had set fire to the curtains and that she had done it on account of the appalling treatment she had received from Mrs Sturmpels, who used to beat her with a stick. Gus Forrest, the Sub-Inspector of Police for South Brisbane, later told the Home Secretary that since the case had come before the Court and Mulla had been removed from her employer, she had 'behaved very well' and did 'her work in a very satisfactory manner', and that 'with kind treatment would make a very good servant'.¹²²

Conclusion

Young Aboriginal domestic servants showed a great deal of courage and initiative in formulating and implementing strategies of resistance. Ultimately, however, their employers firmly controlled the power-base in the relationship. Those children who were fortunate enough to be removed from their exploitative and abusive employment situations were almost always removed through the actions of other Europeans. The powerless situation of those Aboriginal children who worked as domestic servants in 19th and 20th century Queensland meant that they had much in common with slaves.¹²³

Acknowledgments

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the assistance provided by the editor and the comments of the two anonymous referees.

References

Primary sources

Archival files, Queensland State Archives:

A/3699; A/44679; A/44681; A/58665; A/58750; A/58751; A/58912; A/58927; A/69461; A/69776

COL/A613; COL/43; COL/144; COL/145

HOM/J38; HOM/J431; HOM/J539

HOS 13/17; HOS 13/19; HOS 13/20

QS 519/1; QS 629/1/1 (1)

Moreton Bay Courier

¹²¹. 'Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aborigines for 1901': 1138.

¹²². Gus Forrest, Sub-Inspector of Police, South Brisbane, 3 July 1903 in-letter 12665 of 1903, A/58929, Queensland State Archives.

¹²³. Patterson 1982: 1-2.

Queensland Parliamentary Papers, 1901–1945
Queensland Votes and Proceedings, 1897–1902
Winton Herald

Secondary sources

- Aries, Phillippe 1962, *Centuries of childhood*, Jonathan Cape, London.
- Blake, Thom 1987, 'Excluded, exploited and exhibited: Aborigines in Brisbane 1897–1910', *Papers (Brisbane History Group)* 5: 49–58.
- Davidson, Graeme, John Hirst, and Stuart Macintyre (eds) 1998, *The Oxford companion to Australian history*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Evans, Raymond 1992, "'Don't you remember Black Alice, Sam Holt?": Aboriginal women in Queensland history', *Hecate* 8 (2): 6–21.
- 1999, *Fighting words: writing about race*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland.
- Evans, Raymond, Kay Saunders, and Kathryn Cronin 1975, *Exclusion, exploitation and extermination: race relations in colonial Queensland*, Australia and New Zealand Book Co, Sydney.
- Evans, Raymond and Joanne Scott 1996, 'The moulding of menials: the making of Aboriginal domestic servants in early twentieth century Queensland', *Hecate* 22(1): 140–157.
- Fabian, Sue and Morag Loh 1989, *Children in Australia: an outline history*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Falkus, Malcolm, Susan Blackburn, Howard Brasted, Amarjit Kaur, and Denis Wright 1997, *Child labour in Asia: some perspectives on selected countries*, Australian Agency for International Development, Canberra.
- Fesl, Eve Mumewa D 1993, *Conned!*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland.
- Haebich, Anna 2000, *Broken circles: fragmenting Indigenous families 1800–2000*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, Western Australia.
- Haskins, Victoria 2001, 'On the doorstep: Aboriginal domestic service as a "contact zone"', *Australian Feminist Studies* 16(34): 12–25.
- Hegarty, Ruth 1999, *Is that you, Ruthie?*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland.
- Hetherington, Penelope 2002, *Settlers, servants and slaves: Aboriginal and European children in nineteenth-century Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, Western Australia.
- Hodson, Sally 1993, 'Nyungars and work: Aboriginal experiences in the rural economy of the Great Southern Region of Western Australia', *Aboriginal History*, 17(2): 73–92.
- Huggins, Jackie 1987/1988, "'Firing on in the mind": Aboriginal domestic servants in the inter-war years', *Hecate* 13(2): 5–23.
- 1991, 'Experiences of a Queensland Aboriginal domestic servant: Agnes Williams talks to Jackie Huggins', *Labour History* 61(Nov): 1–2.

- 1995, 'White aprons, black hands: Aboriginal domestic servants in Queensland' in *Aboriginal Workers*, Ann McGrath and Kay Saunders (eds) with Jackie Huggins, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Sydney: 188–195.
- Huggins, Rita and Jackie Huggins 1994, *Auntie Rita*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra.
- Kennedy, Marnie 1985, *Born a half-caste*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra.
- Kidd, Rosalind 1997, *The way we civilise: Aboriginal affairs – the untold story*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland.
- 2000, *Black lives, government lies*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney.
- King, Wayne 1996, *Black hours*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney.
- Kingston, Beverley 1975, *My wife, my daughter, and poor Mary Ann: women and work in Australia*, Thomas Nelson (Australia), Melbourne.
- Lawson, Ronald 1973, *Brisbane in the 1890s: a study of an Australian urban society*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland.
- McGrath, Ann 1978 'Aboriginal women workers in the NT, 1911–1939', *Hecate* 4(2): 5–25.
- Matthews, Jill 1984, *Good and mad women: the historical construction of femininity in twentieth-century, Australia*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
- May, Dawn 1983, *From bush to station: Aboriginal labour in the North Queensland pastoral industry, 1861–1897*, Department of History, James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland.
- National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (Australia) 1997, *Bringing them home: report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sydney.
- Patterson, Orlando 1967, *The sociology of slavery: an analysis of the origins, development and structure of Negro slave society in Jamaica*, McGibbon & Kee, London.
- 1982, *Slavery and social death: a comparative study*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Read, Peter 1982, *The stolen generations: the removal of Aboriginal children in New South Wales 1883 to 1969*, Government Printer, Sydney.
- Reynolds, Henry 1990, *With the white people*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Victoria.
- Robinson, Shirleene 2003, "'Something like slavery'? The exploitation of Aboriginal child labour in Queensland, 1842–1945', PhD thesis, University of Queensland.
- 2002, 'The unregulated employment of Aboriginal children in Queensland, 1842–1902', *Labour History* 82 (May): 1–16.
- Rosser, Bill 1985, *Dreamtime nightmares: biographies of Aborigines under the Queensland Aborigines Act*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra.
- Sabbioni, Jennifer 1993, 'I Hate Working for White People', *Hecate* 19(2): 7–29.
- Thorpe, Bill 1996, *Colonial Queensland: perspectives on a frontier society*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland.
- Trollope, Anthony 1873, *Australia and New Zealand. Division I, Queensland*, George Robertson, Melbourne.

Vogan, Arthur James 1890, *The black police: a story of modern Australia*, Hutchinson, London.

Walden, Inara 1995, "'That was slavery days": Aboriginal domestic servants in New South Wales in the twentieth century' in *Aboriginal Workers*, Ann McGrath and Kay Saunders (eds), Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Sydney.