
ABORIGINAL WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA'S TRAVELLING SHOWS, 1930S–1950S

Shadows and Suggestions

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Only a small amount of evidence survives about the performances of Aboriginal women in "leg shows" or strip-tease shows in the first half of the twentieth century. These women are doubly invisible in the historical record because of their indigeneity and as performers in traveling (and hence transitory and ephemeral) sideshows. The performances of Aboriginal women, however, add to current debates and interrogations of the connections between mobility and modernity for Indigenous women. This article argues that Aboriginal women's performances in leg shows, while complicated by disguise and theatricality, as well as by a colonial history of sexual exploitation, must be considered as engagements with modernity.

In the 1940s, three Aboriginal sisters, Iris, Inez, and Phemia Lovett, travelled with touring sideshows throughout eastern Australia. Inez and Phemia worked as ticket-sellers, on the fairy floss stall and they performed on the "line-up" boards attracting customers to shows staged in tents. As she described in her autobiography, Iris was a performer: "I worked the spike box which was a box with spikes that come through the front of the door when it was wound by an Indian in a caftan and turban... The people thought it was real especially when the tomato juice that looked like blood would run down the spikes."¹ Iris's brief recounting of her time, and that of her sisters, as "showies" is in stark contrast to both the remainder of her life, which was dedicated to civil rights activism on the part of her people, and to autobiographies of other Aboriginal women whose youth was spent confined in domestic service or rural labor in miserable conditions.² As such, Iris mentions the seven years she spent on the show circuit only briefly in her story and focused most of her attention in the chapter on the other Aboriginal performers she met who were mainly boxers and roughriders.

Iris's marginalization of her participation in the shows mirrors the position of sideshows generally. In eastern Australia, touring sideshows travelled according to the calendar of Agricultural Society annual shows (what in the American tradition are called "fairs"). Agricultural shows were well established in Australia by the early twentieth century. They represented progress, colonial success, and rural modernity, providing displays of farming life and skills ranging from horse events and livestock competi-

tions to displays of baking and domestic arts. Away from this central forum were the sideshows: smaller, less orthodox and socially acceptable displays that were nonetheless enormously entertaining. Describing the sideshows at a provincial show in 1931, a reporter for the *Brisbane Courier* remarked that "proprietors of these mysteries, like Arabs, crept up in the night, and in the morning a mushroom crop of multi-coloured tents set palpitating the hearts of youngsters."³ Sideshows were regarded as mysterious, exotic, nomadic, and spatially as well as socially outside of the mainstream. Part of their extraordinary character was that they were multi-racial spaces both in the composition of the acts and in their audiences with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal performers combining with entertainers from China, Africa, and America.⁴ The *Queenslander* illustrated newspaper in 1929 described "the merry land of the sideshows" at the Brisbane Exhibition featuring boxing troupes, midgets, the "Tagalog Fire Dancers," glass blowers, and the "fat girl who weighs 40 stone—and she looks it."⁵ The reporter admitted he had "not mentioned all the queer shows in Side-show Land, but you will see what a bright and happy place it is." Beyond even the newspaper's notice were other features of the shows: from the late 1920s, boxing tents were occasionally mentioned in newspapers, but beside them, the "leg show" was invisible in reporting.⁶ Inside the leg-show tent, young women performed a wide variety of burlesque acts: the Eastern Snake Girl, Vanessa the Underdresser, Fifi from Tahiti, and many others now lost to the historical record. Most of the performers, too, are invisible to historians. As will be shown below, there is evidence in the reminiscences of show people themselves (called "showies" in Australia) as well as through autobiographies and oral histories, that several of them were Aboriginal women.

The intersection of sideshows with Agricultural Society shows was an intriguing mix of the orientalist and nomadic associations of one with the modern and progressive overtones of the other. While historians have emphasized the importance of mobility to modernity and the consolidation of the nation as a geographical place, the racialized spaces of shows in the colonial setting of southeastern Australia celebrated *settlement* as the core of modern nation-building.⁷ Despite their mobility—and indeed partly because of it—indigenous performers from Asia, Africa, and the Pacific Islands were excluded from the nation through the legislative framework colloquially known as the "White Australia Policy" that denied them the franchise and participation in the welfare state. Aboriginal performers were excluded from the legal nation as non-citizens, as well as from the "agrarian nation" represented at agricultural shows by their status as the dispossessed. It is apparent, too, that show people generally were excluded from the "respectable" nation because of their peripatetic lifestyle; they were regarded as vulgar, "low," and inappropriate entertainment for the

middle class.⁸ Historians have conversely regarded Aboriginal women as excluded from modernity and the nation by the restrictions imposed upon them by the state through the various surveillance systems devised by governments. Aboriginal women's "very immobility," Angela Woollacott has argued for example, "was a signal characteristic of their straits in these decades...their movement was tightly constrained."⁹ The missions, reserves, and the states' various Aborigines Boards indeed were all structures that Philip Deloria refers to as representing "the colonial dream of fixity" for indigenous people.¹⁰ There were fine and fragile lines between the citizens' right to freedom of movement, movement and travel enabled by modern and modernizing transport, and wandering or nomadism.

This paradox of mobility and modernity for Aboriginal women is complicated further by the importance of sideshows as sites of performance of gender and race. The visual culture within which such performances took place in Australia shared some characteristics with other colonial regimes. The display of Australian indigenous bodies, in ethnographic congresses and touring troupes, with varying degrees of consent, served as proof of otherness, a terrain "on which battles for truth, value, and power are fought out."¹¹ Indeed, much of the display of Aboriginal men's bodies and skills in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was to assert the "truth" of a dying race, and performances of traditional skills were exhibited within a "dramaturgy of power that first exhibits what it 'consigns to oblivion.'"¹² The display of Aboriginal women's bodies could be more complex and contradictory. Scholars of Aboriginal representation have generally agreed on the strength of the impressions of early European visitors to the Pacific in shaping on-going European fantasies of race.¹³ The historian Liz Conor has argued, for example, the "significatory [*sic*] scene of Australian colonialism" was framed both by the noble and ignoble savage, but also by the importance of "race typologies within the idea of feminine beauty."¹⁴ The "native belle" was easily applied to women of what is commonly referred to as Polynesia, but was slow to emerge in Australia. Indeed, on the occasions Aboriginal women were portrayed as belles, their beauty was strictly associated with "her assimilation to European standards of Christian propriety."¹⁵ Aboriginal women more commonly appeared as part of ethnographic dioramas in which the display of "primitive" native bodies was given the sanction of science. The historian Lynette Russell has argued that women especially were almost always represented as sitting on the ground, emphasizing ideas of low status, passivity, and association with dirt and nature.¹⁶ In this way, the visual culture of Aboriginality in Australia had developed in ways significantly different to those in other colonial and imperial settings. Such scholars as the postcolonial theorists Sander Gilman and Sandra Ponzanese have demonstrated that primitivism, sexual lasciviousness, compliance,

and docility were all strong tropes that developed in art and photography around certain colonized groups, especially African, African American, and some Pacific Islands women.¹⁷ In contrast, Australian Aboriginal women were depicted in ways that emphasized, first and foremost, the decline and "inevitable" extinction of their race.

All of these factors—the exclusions from modernity and the nation, women's mobility and the specific context of visual culture—go some way to explain why Aboriginal women as performers are visible only in partial and tantalizing ways. In particular, snatches of sentences, passing remarks, and occasional stories reveal glimpses, suggestions, and flashes of revelation about Aboriginal women in the leg shows. It is unsurprising that evidence about these women's lives is scant and fragmented. They worked in a marginal occupation staged in the transitory and largely hidden world of sideshows. Nor does mobility make them visible because it took them outside Aboriginal surveillance systems into a community where disguise for theatrical purposes was the norm. Records of indigenous lives in Australia generally are notoriously poor, scattered, and fragmented, and in the case of women, this fragmentation is more severe. There similarly is a dearth of evidence about the lives of women involved in sexual exchange. As the labor historian Raelene Frances has noted about women working as prostitutes in Australia, "historians find out most about sex workers when they come into contact with the law, either as accused or victim."¹⁸ She indeed echoes the problems encountered for over thirty years by historians of sexuality. Researching and writing in the 1980s, the Australian historian Judith Allen, for example, argued that there were good reasons for the paucity of evidence surrounding sexual practices and illegal sexual activity. For the most part, she argued, "all parties to the secrets of sex have had compelling reasons for silence."¹⁹ This was very much the case in the multi-racial sexual world of the leg show.

Encounters between audiences and performers in the sideshows are, therefore, largely invisible moments of cultural meaning. Few records of performers survive and even fewer of audience members' responses. What little is known of Aboriginal women's performances in the leg shows, however, hints at a variety of meanings that are investigated here through the lenses of fantasy and desire, disguise and authenticity, and modernity. In doing so, this article contributes to the international historiography of the modern woman's emergence in the early twentieth century. "Modern Girl Studies" has emerged from foundational scholarship on white, Anglophone women in the early twentieth century to examine the emergence of Modern Girls across the globe.²⁰ Racial inflections of the Modern Girl have become a key preoccupation of historians of this field, opening spaces to make a claim for marginalized women's complex engagement with modernity.

The focus on “girls” and their unsettling status—“no longer children, and their unstable and sometimes subversive relationship to social norms relating to heterosexuality, marriage and motherhood”—echoes the use of the term to describe performers in showies’ reminiscences, as well as Aboriginal women’s status as colonized people.²¹ Investigating the meanings of performers’ work and their theatrical identities also contributes to understandings of the complex interplay of fantasy and authenticity. Several authors have argued that debates about black women’s appearance and their engagement with the apparatus of glamour often hinged on highly contested and context-specific notions of authenticity. Australian historians have pointed particularly to both the “primitive” woman and the domestic servant as the acceptable, “authentic” expressions of early twentieth-century Aboriginal femininity.²² Teasing out the meanings of Aboriginal women’s performances in shows extends the analyses developed by other scholars of modern femininities by focusing on particular expressions of modernity in Aboriginal women’s lives rather than on visual representation. In doing so, the importance of cinema, plays and print culture in reinforcing colonial constructions of sexualized femininity is not diminished. The development and reinforcement of the hula and the harem as burlesque staples through popular culture is also examined here as important contextualization of performers’ acts.

As with the very nature of Aboriginal women’s performances, occurring as they did in ephemeral and transitory historical spaces, this article is necessarily made up only of suggestions and partial revelations that form impressions of the possible meanings of the performance. The awkwardness of this approach mirrors the awkwardness of the subject: inter-racial sexual intimacy, agency without power, performances against a backdrop of a wider sexual history little recognized but universally known, and ultimately attempts to bring to light a group of women who, while on stage, nonetheless remain out of the spotlight. In common with other historians of Aboriginal performers, despite my attempts, the real women of the leg shows remain shadowy figures on the historical stage; my attempts to understand their lived experience are speculative.²³ Their performances, however, are important historical moments in feminine modernity in Australia.

Sideshows toured as a group of acts, tests of skill, and, increasingly after the Second World War, rides. They travelled thousands of kilometers each year according to the timetable of agricultural shows throughout Victoria, New South Wales, and southern Queensland, extending over time and with the improvement of transport into northern Queensland. Some sideshow impresarios and their crews also toured separately, especially in the case of boxing troupes or musical acts, converging with other show people at certain times of the year. Amateur and professional rodeo troupes

(often calling themselves Wild West shows) also toured throughout eastern Australia, sometimes also travelling to the North and South Islands of New Zealand as part of their show circuit. Shows then could be stand-alone affairs, or could be the sideshow to Agricultural Society shows. In both cases, mobility was the defining feature of a showie's life.²⁴

Sideshows were also staged in tents. Such liminal spaces of performances and the physical context of those structures, as the historian of sexuality Judith Walkowitz has argued, could facilitate the flexing as well as outright transgression of social mores.²⁵ In contrast to the Agricultural Society show buildings (or the sports club buildings that were sometimes used), and even in contrast to theatres and clubs, tents were spaces imbued with notions of adventure, impermanence, and sexual mystery. Orientalist associations of tents with harems were common in women's magazines, cartoons, and popular fiction and non-fiction of the period: indeed a group of white South Australian women participating in a seaside health camp were referred to in the 1920s press as a "seaside 'harem'" because they stayed in tents on the beach.²⁶ Tents were vulnerable to outsiders, enhancing the fantasies of the sexual availability of the women within the performance space. They were also ideologically distant from houses with their "civilized" connotations and from the role of houses in enforcing European domestic regimes on Aboriginal people as well as on white men.²⁷ Freed from such spatially-defined constraints, sexualized and racialized performances in leg-show tents were dislocated spaces in which complex interactions between performers and audiences were a mixture of fantasy and disguise, colonial remembering and forgetting, a point to which I will return below.

Within this complexity, working in a show could give Aboriginal women mobility which was, as Liz Conor and the historian Victoria Haskins have argued, a feature of both colonial race relations and modernity in Australia.²⁸ Haskins emphasizes the forced mobility of dispossessed peoples and then those controlled by the state, but she argues that even within such strictures, women of Aboriginal descent could have "new experiences, relationships and opportunities."²⁹ On the show circuit, outside of the surveillance systems established by the state, Aboriginal women experienced mobility that was more akin to that defined by Conor as available to non-indigenous women involving "freedom of movement, disposable income and sexual self-determination."³⁰

Iris Lovett-Gardiner was a Gunditjmara woman (born in the western district of the state of Victoria) who became a showie in the 1940s after meeting Aboriginal boxer Tiger Williams. The two travelled the show circuits for almost ten years. Lovett-Gardiner emphasized in her autobiography the opportunities for travel, noting that she had been all over eastern Australia including Tasmania and South Australia. She recalled that "it was an easy

way to see new country and move around a bit."³¹ The fun times and sense of community she experienced while a showie were also clearly motives for pursuing this life: she commented that "as Aboriginal people we were always meeting up with other people that were Aboriginal too."³² Lovett-Gardiner's recollections contrast sharply with the letters of other western Victorian Aboriginal people that survive in the records of the Victorian Board of Protectors of Aborigines. A great number of these were requests to move off, leave temporarily or return to the various reserves to which Aboriginal people were largely confined.³³ On the show circuit, women such as Lovett-Gardiner could experience a life in which the government "interfered" far less.³⁴

Mobility did not necessarily mean total freedom; performers were expected to be disciplined. Tommy and Shirley Castles ran what Tommy claimed was the first striptease show on the circuit. Their biography reveals that life as a travelling showgirl was highly supervised for two reasons: Tommy wanted to keep the men of the boxing troupe away from the girls and Shirley wanted the act to retain some credibility. In recounting that she checked the girls' caravans three times a night, Shirley confessed that "she may have been considered a strict master but in that way she had good girls and good staff... The reasoning was that if the girls were seen out up on the town, maybe in pubs or other places, and the next day on the line-up board they were being introduced as 'Fifi the famous fan dancer', the show immediately lost credibility and became a big laugh."³⁵ Tight supervision of the performers was part of the paternalism that pervaded show relationships; maintaining the integrity of the show was good for everybody but was an unequal burden.

Little, however, is really known about the acts. Performers' stage names often were the only fact recorded about them. Information comes through ephemera such as posters and advertisements, through the reminiscences of showies themselves, as well as through the occasional oral history recording. In the local history *Rodeo at Lang Lang* the 1930s sideshows are listed as including Jimmy Sharman's and Harry Johns' boxing troupes, the bar tent and "Vanessa the Undresser" and "Theresa the Stripteaser."³⁶ In Larry Delahunty's shows in the 1950s, "Candy and Sally were the dancing girls. Candy was billed as a hula dancer 'direct from Tahiti', although she was part Aborigine [*sic*] who until then had been no further north than Townsville [Queensland]."³⁷ Owen Rutherford Lloyd was showing in Tasmania in the 1940s, "and on the next pitch was a stripshow... The Harem, The Dance of the Seven Veils and a few assorted specialties kept those girls busy all the time. There was a Chinese, a black and a blonde. Not a bad class of girl considering, all of them decent types, working hard and not getting much out of it."³⁸ Very occasional glimpses of Aboriginal women's performances

at shows are also gained through oral reminiscence. For example, as boys in country New South Wales in the 1950s, the Australian musician Don Walker and his brother used to swim the river in order to sneak into the annual Agricultural Show. More specifically, they were attempting to sneak into the strip-show tent. Walker recalled the "barker" (the spruiker out the front of the tent billing the attractions as "Fifi from Tahiti" and "Gigi from French Polynesia,") but he remarked that "these girls looked a lot like Australian country town Aboriginal-Irish to me."³⁹

Leg shows were part of what the historians Richard Broome and Alick Jackomos refer to as shows trading on "enticement and allure": in short, leg shows were selling sex.⁴⁰ This was particularly the case for audiences made up of youths and for those in country areas for whom the leg show might be a rare opportunity for titillation. The Melbourne historian John Lack saw "Bubbles" with his mates when they were youths. "Bubbles" (a non-indigenous woman from all reports) danced, stripped, and took a bubble-bath in front of many audiences per day. She usually coaxed an embarrassed onlooker to come and scrub her back. Lack recalled that he and his friends "were panting through the act. It was the first female flesh we had seen."⁴¹ Lovett-Gardiner referred to the sexual nature of the shows (at the same time distancing herself from such performances) describing Margaret, the Castles' daughter, doing "the dance of the seven veils a hoochie-koochie [*sic*]."⁴² The Seven Veils was a well known strip-tease. Other showies were less coy about Aboriginal women's sexualized performances. Betty Atkinson, from Swan Hill (on the NSW-Victorian border), worked for the Castles in their "Kiss the Girl" show. The show promised a ten-shilling note to any man who could, in less than a minute, "pin a young girl... [and] plant a kiss on her rosy red lips."⁴³ Betty was slender and small, and importantly "she was lithe and quick and when oiled up could evade most big men."⁴⁴

As can be seen from the names of acts, Aboriginal women were absent in the publicity for shows and, instead, two long held and entrenched notions of the eroticized "other" were exploited in the theatre of the leg shows. One was the docile and sexually available "South Seas" woman, and the other was the sexually enslaved "harem girl." The photography historian Jane Lydon argues that photographic culture in the 1930s to the 1950s "both revealed and obscured Indigenous Australians, demonstrating how perception is dependent upon its object assuming certain acceptable forms."⁴⁵ This argument can be extended to performance in this period. The use of Pacific Island identities for the girls was common, and was sometimes mixed with some generic "jungle" props and served to represent Aboriginal women's sexuality in an acceptable form. Lovett-Gardiner wrote that Johnny Foster's show had "Island girls with snakes that used to crawl around their bodies and they also had monkeys that were mostly for show."⁴⁶ Aboriginal sisters

Maisie Kelly and Hazel Vale laughed uproariously while telling of the “hula hula dance” that used to be performed at the Armidale Show:

MK: Auntie Lil... used to dance on the stage—she was pretty good... they came here to Armidale and they were saying oh meet these Fijians from Fiji, or Honolulu, doin [*sic*] the dance and another piece, but she was a McKenzie from up on North Hill. We knew them you see, two dark women, yeah, they said Black Fijians from Armidale, wearing little skirts [laughing obscures the rest of the sentence]. Oh and after the show [more laughing].
Interviewer: They passed themselves off as Hawaiians?
MK: Oh yeah...⁴⁷

The particular images of the primitive and exotic that were offered at shows were dominant, non-threatening versions of racial difference. As the historian Nancy Neno argued in her analysis of Josephine Baker’s performances in Berlin in the 1920s, the particular commodification of difference that was exposed through the female body in sexualized performances relied on particular cultural contexts.⁴⁸ The image of the primitive sexual woman in southeastern Australia in the early twentieth century had to be codified in ways that were not associated with Aboriginality. In this way colonialism and its outcomes had to be forgotten. A different set of colonial relationships were invoked instead to alter the epidermis if not the deep tissue of sexual encounters in leg shows.

Embedded deeply in European Australian consciousness, the welcoming, alluring nature of “Polynesian” women played out in remarkably unchanging ways. In the *Sydney Morning Herald* in September 1928, a quarter page photograph of “a comely island belle” seated on a woven mat smiled gently out of the page, surrounded by the symbols of island life—flowers, a conch shell, leis, and her “grass” skirt. The story commented on the effects of these “island belles”: “The charms of the women of the Polynesian races in the Eastern Pacific have led many a wanderer to the islands to stay there for the remainder of his life. In Samoa and elsewhere Europeans have married native women.”⁴⁹ Hula had also long been “saturated with sexualized understandings,” and was popularized within white cultures through music, plays, and film in the early twentieth century.⁵⁰ Hawaiian Clubs, established in Adelaide and Sydney with branches throughout the states by the late 1930s, tended to focus on “Hawaiian” music, but a double-page spread in the 1939 *Argus* (Melbourne) instructing women on the finer points of the “South Seas love dance” demonstrated its fashionable status.⁵¹ Hula and Hawaiian music were also popular in local entertainments, dances, and concerts. Aboriginal woman Ruby Langford Ginibi wrote of concerts held in the old picture theatre in her youth. Ruby and her sister Gwennie “used

to sing 'To you my sweetheart, aloha, from the bottom of my heart', with these big hula grass skirts on to dance in."⁵² The historians Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon have also demonstrated the enormous influence exerted on the movie-going public by Hollywood's generic South Seas woman, embodied by the American film star Dorothy Lamour in the years leading up to World War Two.⁵³

The second staple of leg shows was the Dance of the Seven Veils. The dance, with its links to the figure of Salome, Oscar Wilde's play by the same name and, by 1950, the Rita Hayworth film, was widely known and unmistakably a striptease. In 1940, there were objections raised in Melbourne to its performance by an English burlesque company. The impresario declared it a "fuss about nothing," asserting that ballet audiences regularly saw women dressed more scantily than his girls. Dancer Miss Jenny Howard declared the seven veils a "beautiful dance" in which the dropping of the seventh veil was synchronized with a complete blackout in the theatre.⁵⁴ Even in more respectable theatre, "the harem" signaled a heavily sexualized theme. When "The Lady of the Harem" was staged in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1927, it was "recommended entirely for adult audiences." The adult audience was invited to "take a peep into the forbidden precincts of the Harem... Take a lesson in love from 'The Lady of the Harem'." Audiences were assured the play was "set amid the glitter of Oriental splendour, a throbbing romance of the East."⁵⁵ There were literally thousands of newspaper stories about harems in Australian newspapers between 1920 and 1950, and even while articles usually proclaimed "the end of the harem" as "Eastern" countries modernized, they continued to assert the exoticism and sensuality of harem women. In a 1937 issue of a provincial NSW newspaper, the women's page contained a large photo of a veiled and bejeweled young woman swirling in dance. The caption read: "A harem girl dances exotically for her master," reinforcing the bonded nature of the woman (or the fantasy) in the picture.⁵⁶ Images of the desert and barely clad women incarcerated in seraglio also adorned every day consumer objects and advertising such as chocolate boxes.⁵⁷

These two sexually exotic portrayals of non-European femininity stand in stark contrast to the key ways Aboriginal femininity was visible in this period according to Conor: not simply as primitive but as coarse in contrast to refinement, as naked, hunched, or indoors in contrast to the groomed woman in public, the "Mannequin."⁵⁸ Where Aboriginal women did appear as "ornamental," it was through the ethnographic view displayed largely for tourists, within which nakedness was cast as anthropologically interesting and not sexually exciting. Conor argues, however, that even while visual representations of Aboriginal women ridiculed their adoption of modern

femininities, the persistent image was of them "desiring, like white women, to appear."⁵⁹

The audiences to whom Aboriginal women appeared in shows are shadowy but some broad characteristics can be deduced. The photographic record of the main show arena, the demography of rural southeastern Australia, and evidence from showies' reminiscences and biographies indicate that show audiences were predominantly white.⁶⁰ Oral histories and reminiscences of indigenous people, however, especially boxers and horsemen, demonstrate that there were Aboriginal spectators at some displays.⁶¹ Indeed the boxer Billy Primmer described the families of black and white boxers sharing "a pie at the pie cart outside venues" in the 1950s.⁶² Don Walker's remarks also show that "sneaking in" was a possibility for those not supposed to be there. The audiences in the leg shows were probably multi-racial but European dominated, and probably included youths.

Theatre historians demonstrate that audiences for burlesque shows in America changed in the early twentieth century. The historian Peter Buckley has described American burlesque audiences in the 1870s as "simple and almost homely people... comfortable, middle-aged women from the suburbs and their daughters."⁶³ By the 1920s, the strip tease had become the mainstay of burlesque shows and it was also during this decade that "strip tease was relegated to male-only audiences."⁶⁴ The historian Andrea Friedman similarly argues that by the 1930s in New York City, "legitimate theater drew a middle-class and mixed gender (therefore respectable) audience... Burlesque, in contrast, catered predominantly to working-class men."⁶⁵ That leg shows in Australian travelling shows were usually located near the boxing tent and the bar tent demonstrate that by the inter-war period at the latest, leg shows were for a male audience only. The showie Gail Magdziarz told Richard Broome that while most of the audience was probably married to "better-looking wives," the strip shows were "like a pressure cooker, it let off a bit of steam, and they could survive on that." Similarly Bernice Kopple, a blue-eyed, blonde Scot nevertheless known as the "Eastern Snake Girl," stated that the "spectacle of an attractive girl dancing with, to most people, repulsive reptiles is something men find hard to resist... Some fellows come to see a show, and stay for hours."⁶⁶

When Aboriginal women performing as "hula" or "harem" girls appeared, however, they were not simply the subjects of desire and fantasy: they had desires of their own. "Girls" were paid a steady wage in an age when most Aboriginal workers had large proportions—up to ninety percent in some cases—of their meager wages paid directly to the states' Aborigines Boards, supposedly to be held in trust.⁶⁷ These wages were either doled out piecemeal by the authorities or disappeared altogether. Sideshow perform-

ers, however, were out of reach of the various authorities and, from the evidence available about other sideshow performers, were paid the same rates regardless of race.⁶⁸ Living expenses were taken care of in the show "family" but there is some evidence that women had to pay for the materials to make their own costumes. Lovett-Gardiner wrote that she and the girls with whom she worked made their own costumes: "bras and tights with spangles and the same coloured skirt—they were a pretty blue," noting, too, that they had to buy the spangles themselves, presumably out of their wages.⁶⁹ In a world where her cousins were probably apprenticed or in domestic service with their wages held in trust by the Board, were possibly wearing employers' cast-off clothing or saving their meager allowances to buy essential and rudimentary clothes, buying spangles out of her own wages can be seen as a strong statement of autonomy.⁷⁰

The glamour of performing, such that it was, and the alternative it presented to more prosaic occupations may have also been an added attraction for leg-show performers. Aboriginal girls could be coerced by the government into domestic service from the ages of fourteen years to twenty-one years; after the age of twenty-one, some had a range of opportunities open to them including hotel work and employment as barmaids.⁷¹ Performance as an alternative to limited occupational choices was certainly the case for the women in the Hawaiian historian Adria Imada's study of hula circuits in America. She argues that at home, "Hawaiian women could plot their futures as cannery workers, waitresses or domestics—or, if college educated, perhaps as school teachers or secretaries." The hula circuit "presented a dream ticket out of Hawai'i, promising fame, glamour, and middle-class status difficult for them to achieve in the plantation and service industries 

⁷² Aboriginal women were not aiming for middle-class status, but for transitory relief from their position at the bottom of the social and economic pile where alternatives to domestic service were often only available to urban girls who took up factory work.⁷³ It was a fantasy not only entered into in the fringe world of the sideshow. Margaret Tucker, who in later life became a well-known Aboriginal rights activist, had a reputation, as a young woman in the late 1920s, for her fine singing voice. Margaret's performances were based, as many were at the time, on African-American popular music and included *Way down upon the Swanee River*, *Old Black Joe*, and *Carry me back to Old Virginny*. A further hint of her repertoire lies in her comment that Mrs. Smith helped her to "make hula skirts for our concerts."⁷⁴ She was "much sought after for concerts and entertainments" and while in domestic service performed at the parties of some of Melbourne's elite families. This was a double-edged sword for Margaret. On the one hand, it was "wonderful fun for a young Aboriginal woman who from childhood had seen her people suffer hurts and indignities and had been too miserable to speak up against

them." But on the other, she knew "I was just an Aboriginal maid, getting to love parties and all that kind of life stood for."⁷⁵

Aboriginal women's performances then were a mixture of desires. The women themselves worked and lived amidst friends and sometimes relations. They traveled, earned wages, and were on the stage. Their performances were also, perhaps, a fantasy of forgetting, where colonial history and current circumstances were erased. The popular tropes of exoticism hid their aboriginality.

There were compelling cultural and historical reasons for the disguise of Aboriginal women's racial and sexual identity in the leg-show tent. Histories of frontier Australia, Aboriginal domestic service and mission life, as well as the narratives of women of the "Stolen Generations" are thick with sexual violence against indigenous women at the hands of white men.⁷⁶ The "half-caste menace," with its literal embodiment of sexual connection between white men and Aboriginal women, had also preoccupied every group concerned with racial fitness from the 1890s onwards. So vicious were portrayals of Aboriginal women's sexuality in popular culture that only a cultural millstone of shame and self-loathing on the part of whites could explain them. The historian of colonial Australia Raymond Evans has argued that "on all Australian colonial frontiers... Aboriginal women were progressively reduced to a position of extreme dehumanisation in white eyes." He concludes that "frontier interracial sexual relations thus occurred largely within a context of unfreedom, exploitation and terror."⁷⁷ Every message in popular culture about Aboriginal women resounded with the impossibility of their sexual desirability: cartoons in masculinist magazines depicted them as gauche or dirty; mission literature and ethnographic material emphasized their child-like qualities. Even where interracial marriage was possible, the cultural commentator Fiona Probyn-Rapsey argues, the "racial politics of twentieth-century Australia, including the attempted biological assimilation of Aboriginal people, the confusion of Aboriginality with skin colour, the abuse of Aboriginal women and the fear of 'race mixing' haunt the figure of the white man with the Aboriginal family."⁷⁸ It was easier, consequently, to advertise a fantasy of South Seas dusky maidens than to confront the extent to which Aboriginal women and white men had a sexual history and what that history represented for white settler Australians—at best, violent conquest rather than peaceful settlement.⁷⁹

Disguise also played an important role in the lives of indigenous people as they used it to evade the authorities. As legislation became more punitive at the turn of the twentieth century, Aboriginal life became increasingly controlled by white governments. Under the guise of protection, employment, movement, and wages all came under government control as well as the more "private" aspects of Aboriginal life such as dress, marriage, and,

most notoriously, child-rearing. Many Aboriginal people took the option of disguising their aboriginality if it was possible. In the Aboriginal artist Sally Morgan's autobiography, *My Place*, she tells of a childhood encased in deception and disguise. Her grandmother, Daisy, insisted on raising the family as "Indian."⁸⁰ Another example closer to the home of our leg-show performers was that of the 1920s horseman and impresario Bob West, father of some of the best equestrian performers of the 1940s. The circus historian Mark St Leon writes that "West appeared to 'resent' his aboriginality and concealed his true ethnicity from his children [until just before his death], telling them they had 'Spanish blood'."⁸¹ Disguise was common in early twentieth-century Aboriginal life for a variety of reasons usually related to avoiding the unwelcome attention of authorities and making life easier for children.

Disguise in the leg-show tent operated differently and, arguably, was part of another tradition of "showing" indigeneity. In the tent, however, authenticity was not a primary objective; the exotic identities on show were all false and only in the thinnest ways purported otherwise. For all their confusion, "native" or "eastern" identities were designed to add glamorous primitivism to the act: if they did not, impresarios would not have bothered with them. The deception, and the audience's willingness to be deceived, was at the heart of such "ethnographic burlesque."⁸² The theatrical identities women took on were no less authentic than roles played by Indigenous people in exhibitions, for example, where tropes of primitivism and "wildness" were dominant and "authenticity" often lacking. The historians Joanne Scott and Ross Laurie, in their examination of the Aboriginal presence at the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Brisbane Exhibitions, found that the Aboriginal presence shifted much more towards performances of assimilation during the 1910s. For example the "true native gunyah... [comprising] a full-blooded warrior in native costume (respectable) and his gin and piccaninny" at the 1912 Exhibition was replaced by the presence of a young woman in a domestic service uniform at the Aboriginal court of the Brisbane Exhibition in 1914.⁸³

Aboriginal women's participation in travelling shows has ramifications for how we tell the stories of Aboriginal life in the first half of the twentieth century and extends our ideas on how Aboriginal women wanted to be seen even if that appearance was constrained by gendered and colonial discourses. It also challenges us to think beyond visual culture as a primary way of being seen in modernity, especially given the difficulties around the circumstances of production of many images of Aboriginal people.⁸⁴ I have argued elsewhere that Aboriginal men regularly displayed their physical skills at shows in athletic and rough-riding competitions. Though few photographs survive of these events, audiences watched and Aboriginal

men's bodies were seen in self-defined ways in an era when physical fitness and bodily display were one way in which citizens participated in the modern nation.⁸⁵ But performances were public, in an open-air arena, and it is the indoor spaces that are difficult to see. As a result the literature that explores relationships between, and the shared spaces of, Aboriginal and non-indigenous women in Australia has focused on a relatively narrow set of relationships: mission stations and relationships involving domestic service are strongly represented, and humanitarian work is also well explored.⁸⁶ These discussions also tend to be confined to the colonial era or to frontier spaces. In southeastern Australia, where the "frontier" was considered to have disappeared by the 1890s, dominant historical narratives of indigenous and non-indigenous women diverge quite markedly for the first half of the twentieth century. Where urban white women were making the most of expanding employment and educational opportunities, and rural white women were joining tennis clubs and identifying themselves as robust and healthy Outdoor Girls, urban Aboriginal women have been largely invisible. Rural Aboriginal women have been almost exclusively represented as victims of increasingly punitive legislation, continuing horrific sexual exploitation, and child-removal policies.⁸⁷ Aboriginal history for this period has been structured by the legislation that affected them, legislation that regulated marriage, movement, employment, and child-rearing. For non-Aboriginal women, the narrative of modernity has dominated their story. Histories of white women in this period focus on the fertility transition, expanding employment opportunities, mobility, romance, and glamour.⁸⁸ Even in rural areas, while the technologies of modernity were slow to arrive, the language, self-definition, and aspirations offered by urban modernity infiltrated young white women's lives.⁸⁹

In addition, scholars of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century leisure, recreation, and agricultural shows have focused largely on non-indigenous rural communities and spectators.⁹⁰ The arguments made are that communal leisure pursuits strengthened reciprocal ties between neighbors and were integral to community-building, and that from the early twentieth century they represented an expression of modernity in rural life.⁹¹ Aboriginal participation in these activities, however, has only been tangential to these studies, thereby effectively excluding Aboriginal sport and leisure from notions of community-building and from modernity more generally.⁹² Modernity remains something of which indigenous people were objects through legislation, not subjects through agency and self-determination.

Yet the small amount of evidence of Aboriginal women in travelling shows adds to other evidence of Aboriginal women's participation in this process of making themselves modern. The anthropologists Judy Inglis and Diane Barwick, in their studies in the 1960s, both provided ample evidence

of Aboriginal communities pursuing leisure activities and community-building in ways almost identical to those in the non-indigenous community.⁹³ Ann Nakano-Jackson detailed a thriving youth culture including dresses, dances, and cars in her study of indigenous families in the Canberra region, and the few studies of popular music in Aboriginal communities paint similar images of the importance of the cinema, wireless, dances and music in inter-war Aboriginal life.⁹⁴ Aboriginal women's performances on the stage with their associated costumes, make-up, and wages must surely be seen as part of a modern indigenous narrative.

Very often, as women's historians, fragments of evidence seem too insubstantial to bear the weight of a full scholarly article. Snippets of interesting material, shards that might illuminate aspects of women's lives suffer from the process of writing about them, and in the end we are tempted to discard them in favor of more acceptable, chunkier lumps of evidence that enable us to make more substantial claims about the past. The lack of evidence that remains about leg shows on the travelling-show circuit, their specific format and their performers and audiences is to be expected given their transitory nature and their intention as an ephemeral space of fantasy. That little evidence survives, however, does not mean they did not take place. Exploring what is extant in the contexts of mobility, work, the use of disguise, bodies on display, and modernity allows an expanded understanding of the lives of Aboriginal women in the first half of the twentieth century.

NOTES

¹Iris Lovett-Gardiner, *Lady of the Lake: Aunty Iris's Story* (Melbourne: Koorie Heritage Trust Inc, 1997), 65.

²See for example Amy Laurie & Ann McGrath, "I was a drover once myself: Amy Laurie of Kununurra," in *Fighters and Singers: The Lives of Some Aboriginal Women*, eds. Isobel White, Diane Barwick and Betty Meehan (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1985); and Stuart Rintoul, ed., *The Wailing: A National Black Oral History* (Sydney: William Heinemann, 1993).

³*Brisbane Courier*, 28 September 1931, 10.

⁴Richard Broome and Alick Jackomos, *Sideshow Alley* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1998).

⁵*The Queenslander*, 22 August 1929, 57. The Talgalgo Fire Walkers are pictured in Broome and Jackomos, *Sideshow Alley*, 53. The reporter very likely misspelled the act's name.

⁶Broome and Jackomos comment that press reports of Agricultural Shows 'virtually ignored' sideshows until the 1930s despite their regular presence on showgrounds from the 1910s. *Sideshow Alley*, 22.

⁷See for example Tony Ballantyne, "On Place, Space and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand," *New Zealand Journal of History* 45, no.1 (2011): 50–70; other historians who have argued the link between mobility, or more specifically freedom of movement, and modernity are Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004); Victoria Haskins, "From the Centre to the City: modernity, mobility and mixed-descent Aboriginal domestic workers from central Australia," *Women's History Review* 18, no. 1 (February 2009): 155–175.

⁸Broome and Jackomos, *Sideshow Alley*, 47–50.

⁹Woollacott, *To Try her Fortune*, 13.

¹⁰Philip J Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 27.

¹¹Diana Taylor, "A savage performance: Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Coco Fusco's 'Couple in the Cage'," *TDR* 42, no.2 (Summer 1998): 160–175, quotation on 162. See also Roslyn Poignant, "Looking for Tambo," *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin* 9, no. 1–2, (1997): 27–37; and Faith Walker, "The reinvention of the 'noble savage': Archibald Meston and 'Wild Australia'," *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin* 9, no.1–2, (1997): 37–43.

¹²Stephen Mullaney quoted in Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Ethnographic Burlesque," *TDR* 42, no.2 (Summer 1998): 176–180, quotation on 176.

¹³See for example Bernard Smith, *European Vision in the South Pacific* (Sydney: Harper & Row, 1960), 122; Liz Conor, "'This striking ornament of nature': The 'native belle' in the Australian colonial scene," *Feminist Theory* 7, no.2 (2006): 197–218.

¹⁴Conor, "'This striking ornament,'" 198.

¹⁵Conor, "'This striking ornament,'" 209.

¹⁶Lynette Russell, "Wellnigh impossible to describe," *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, iss.2 (December 1999): 23–54, see 38–9.

¹⁷For the links between artistic and medical representations of the sexualized black female body, see Sander L Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Towards and Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 204–242; Sandra Ponzanesi, "Beyond the Black Venus: Colonial Sexual Politics and Contemporary Visual Practices," *Italian Colonialism: Legacies and Memories*, eds. Jaqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005); see also Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996) and Anne McLintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), both of which

emphasize the importance of exhibiting and photographing colonized peoples as part of the development of ideas about race.

¹⁸Raelene Frances, *Selling Sex: A Hidden History of Prostitution* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007), 46.

¹⁹~~Geoffrey Elton, *The Practice of History*, 1967, cited in~~ Judith Allen, *Sex & Secrets: Crimes involving Australian women since 1880* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990), 10, 2.

²⁰Foundational studies include Sally Alexander, "On Becoming a Woman in London in the 1920s and 1930s," in *Metropolis: London Histories ad Representations since 1800*, eds. David Feldman and Gareth Stedman Jones, (London: Routledge, 1989); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

²¹Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, "The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device," in *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, eds. Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 1–24, quotation on 9.

²²See for example Lynn M Thomas, "The Modern Girl and Racial Respectability in 1930s South Africa," in *The Modern Girl*, 96–119, see especially 106; Haskins, "From the Centre"; Liz Conor, "'This striking ornament of nature'"; Liz Conor, "'Blackfella Missus Too Much Proud': Techniques of Appearing, Femininity, and Race in Australian Modernity," in *The Modern Girl*, 220–239.

²³The same problem confronted Joanne Scott and Ross Laurie in their investigation of more mainstream performances by indigenous people and display of their artifacts. The performers and makers themselves remained largely unknown. See Joanne Scott and Ross Laurie, "Colonialism on Display: Indigenous People and Artefacts at an Australian Agricultural Show," *Aboriginal History* 31 (2007): 45–62.

²⁴See for example, map of show circuits for 1954–55 compiled from dates in *The Outdoor Showman* and with the assistance of Jimmy Sharman in Broome and Jackomos, *Sideshow Alley*, 32.

²⁵Judith R Walkowitz, "The 'Vision of Salome': Cosmopolitanism and Erotic Dancing in Central London, 1908–1918," *American Historical Review* 108, no. 2 (April 2003), 347.

²⁶"Seaside 'harem'," *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 15 October 1921, 8; see also popular cartoons such as Mandrake the Magician in which 'Nadra' was rescued from a tent after being kidnapped to be part of a harem, *Australian Women's Weekly*, 29 May 1937, 29; and reviews of Ruth and Helen Hoffman's book *Our Arabian Nights*, in several newspapers and magazines in September 1940. The Hoffman sisters travelled with Bedouins and were housed in a large tent beside the 'harem tent'. See *Australian Women's Weekly*, 14 September 1940, 39.

²⁷On the links between houses and the enforcement of white domestic regimes on Aboriginal people see Bain Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989); and Denis Byrne, "Nervous Landscapes: Race and Space in Australia"

in *Making Settler Colonial Space*, eds. Tracey Banivanua Mar & Penelope Edmonds (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 109–110. On the importance of marriage and family in domesticating white men see David Goodman, *Gold Seeking: Victoria and California in the 1850s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

²⁸Conor, *Spectacular Modern Woman*; Haskins, “From the Centre”.

²⁹Haskins, “From the Centre”, 170.

³⁰Conor, “Blackfella Missus”, 228.

³¹Lovett-Gardiner, *Lady of the Lake*, 67.

³²Lovett-Gardiner, *Lady of the Lake*, 64, 69.

³³These letters are housed in the Victorian Public Records Office, but some have been published in Elizabeth Nelson, Sandra Smith & Patricia Grimshaw, eds., *Letters from Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867–1926* (Carlton: History Department, University of Melbourne, 2002).

³⁴The Aboriginal activist Isabel Flick recalled a childhood in which the government was always “interfering.” Emphasis in the original. Isabel Flick and Heather Goodall, *Isabel Flick: The Many Lives of an Extraordinary Aboriginal Woman* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 2004), 5.

³⁵Bob Morgan *The Showies* (privately published 1995), 36.

³⁶Jim Ridgeway and Jim Lowden, *Rodeo at Lang Lang* (Kilmore, Victoria: Lowden Publishing, 1976), 59. Richard Broome identifies one version of “Vanessa the Undresser” as Vanessa Lee from Tennessee in Broome and Jackomos, *Sideshow Alley*, 67.

³⁷James Oram, *The Last Showman: Larry Delahunty’s Larrikin Life* (Chippendale, NSW: Sun Books, 1992), 7.

³⁸Angela Badger, *The Boy from Bunningyong: The Life of an Australian Showman* (Melbourne: Victoria Press, 1993), 67–68.

³⁹Don Walker, personal communication with the author, 2001.

⁴⁰Broome and Jackomos, *Sideshow Alley*, 66.

⁴¹John Lack cited in Broome and Jackomos, *Sideshow Alley*, 68

⁴²Lovett-Gardiner, *Lady of the Lake*, 65.

⁴³Richard Broome and Corinne Manning, *A Man of All Tribes: The Life of Alick Jackomos*, (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006), 55.

⁴⁴Broome and Manning, *Man of All Tribes*, 56.

⁴⁵Jane Lydon, “Photography and recognition of Indigenous Australians: Framing Aboriginal Prisoners,” *Australian Historical Studies* 43, no. 2 (April 2012): 210–232, quotation on 232. See also Russell, “Wellnigh impossible to describe.”

⁴⁶Lovett-Gardiner, *Lady of the Lake*, 67.

⁴⁷Maisie Kelly and Hazel Vale (nee Archibald), interviewed by Chris Sullivan, 1990, Chris Sullivan Collection, TRC2750/556, National Library of Australia (NLA). Maisie and Hazel are descendants of the New England groups, Nganyaywana, Dainggatti and Gumbainggir.

⁴⁸Nancy Nenko, "Femininity, the Primitive, and Modern Urban Space: Josephine Baker in Berlin," in *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. Katharina von Ankum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 145–161, see 146.

⁴⁹"The women of the Pacific," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 September 1928, 13.

⁵⁰Matt Wittman, "Empire of Culture: US Entertainers and the Making of the Pacific Circuit, 1850–1890," (PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 2010), 127. DeSoto Brown also writes of an upsurge in the use of idealised Hawaiian images in advertising in the interwar period, in "Beautiful, Romantic Hawaii: How the Fantasy Image Came to Be," *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 20, (1994): 252–271. In the Australian context, the *Brisbane Courier's* "In the Social Sphere" page for 15 December 1927 reported that a "Hawaiian orchestra" had played at the birthday party of twenty-year-old Frank Arthur, 22; and Hawaiian Clubs were formed in Adelaide and Sydney by the mid 1930s with branches throughout the states. See Adelaide Hawaiian Club, *The Adelaide Hawaiian Club brings into Australian homes the music of Hawaii*, (Adelaide: privately published, 1938).

⁵¹"Hula-Hula, South Seas Love Dance", *Argus*, 17 June 1939, 11–12.

⁵²Ruby Langford Ginibi, *All My Mob* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2007), 75.

⁵³Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon, "Searching for Dorothy Lamour: War and Sex in the South Pacific, 1941–45," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 18, no.1 (July 1999): 3–18.

⁵⁴*The Argus*, 5 June 1940, 5.

⁵⁵*Evening Post*, (Wellington, New Zealand), 14 July 1927, 2.

⁵⁶*Barrier Miner* (Broken Hill), 20 May 1937.

⁵⁷See for example the MacRobertson Chocolate Box in the collection of State Library of Victoria. Image H2003.101/283, 284, 285, accessed August 20, 2010, www.slv.gov.au.

⁵⁸Conor, *Spectacular, Modern Woman*, see chapter 6, "The 'Primitive' Woman in the Late Colonial Scene," 175–208 and chapter 4, "The Mannequin in the Commodity Scene," 105–128.

⁵⁹Conor, *Spectacular Modern Woman*, 206.

⁶⁰For photographs, see for example photographs of crowds at the Walgett Show in 1934, At Work & Play 0313, State Library of New South Wales (accessed May 17, 2009 through www.pictureaustralia.org); reminiscences of leg-show performers in Broome and Jackomos describe white male audiences for their shows, *Sideshow Alley*, 67–68. The population profile of Victoria and southern NSW by the turn of the twentieth century was overwhelmingly European, especially in rural areas but in northern NSW and southern Queensland slightly less so. The difficulties and debates about Aboriginal population data are discussed thoroughly in Len Smith et al., “Fractional Identities: The Political Arithmetic of Aboriginal Victorians,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 533–551.

⁶¹See for example Billy Crawford interviewed by Chris Sullivan, 1989, Chris Sullivan Collection, TRC2750/569, NLA; Bill Gray interviewed by Chris Woodland, 1993, TRC3002/1, NLA; Clarry Grogan interviewed by Kevin Bradley and Peter Ellis, 1990, TRC2604, NLA.

⁶²Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 2005), 254.

⁶³Peter Buckley, “The Culture of ‘leg-work’: The Transformation of Burlesque after the Civil War” cited in Lillian Schlissel, “Impertinent Women and Powerful Men: A Long View of Burlesque [review],” *American Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (1994): 100–106, quotation on 102.

⁶⁴Schlissel, “Impertinent Women”, 104; Andrea Friedman, “‘The Habitats of Sex-Crazed Perverts’: Campaigns against Burlesque in Depression-era New York City,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7, no. 2 (1996): 203–238, 208.

⁶⁵Friedman, “The Habitats of Sex-Crazed Perverts”, 207.

⁶⁶Gail Magdziarz and Bernice Kopple in Broome and Jackomos, *Sideshow Alley*, 68, 67.

⁶⁷See Rosalind Kidd, *Trustees on Trial: Recovering the Stolen Wages* (Canberra, Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007), 61–62 for figures on wages.

⁶⁸Professional Aboriginal roughriders were paid equally to whites in the troupe and Richard Broome found no evidence of large wage differences between performers in the ‘freak shows’. See Kathryn M Hunter, “Rough Riding: Aboriginal Participation in Rodeos and Travelling Shows to the 1950s,” *Aboriginal History* 32 (2008): 82–96; and Richard Broome, “Not Strictly Business: Freaks and the Australian Showground World,” *Australian Historical Studies* 40, iss. 103 (2009): 323–342.

⁶⁹Lovett-Gardiner, *The Lady of the Lake*, 69.

⁷⁰For a discussion of Aboriginal domestic servants and clothing see Conor, “Blackfella Missus,” 233.

⁷¹On Aboriginal women and bar work see Jackie Huggins, “White Aprons, Black Hands: Aboriginal Women Domestic Servants in Queensland,” *Labour History* 69 (November 1995): 188–195, 189.

⁷²Adira L Imada, "Hawaiians on Tour: Hula Circuits through the American Empire," *American Quarterly*, 56, no. 1 (2004): 114–149, quotations on 126, 130.

⁷³For example when Merle Morgan moved to Melbourne from country Victoria, she worked in a hosiery factory. Broome and Manning, *Man of All Tribes*, 65.

⁷⁴Margaret Tucker, *If Everyone Cared: The Autobiography of Margaret Tucker* (Melbourne: Angus & Robertson, 1977), 164.

⁷⁵Tucker, *If Everyone Cared*, 163.

⁷⁶See for example Jan Critchett *A Distant Field of Murder: Western District Frontiers 1838–1848* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1990); Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them home: Report on the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* (Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997).

⁷⁷Raymond Evans, *Fighting Words: Writing About Race* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1999): 201, 204. See also Victoria Haskins and John Maynard, "Sex, Race and Power: Aboriginal Men and White Women in Australian History," *Australian Historical Studies* 126 (October 2005): 191–216.

⁷⁸Fiona Probyn-Rapsey, "Black Sheep Nation," *ACH* 26 (2007): 171–193, quotation on 173.

⁷⁹See for example, Frances' discussion of Aboriginal 'prostitution' in, *Selling Sex*; see also Patricia Grimshaw *et al*, *Creating a Nation*, (Ringwood: McPhee Gribble, 1994); Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1982).

⁸⁰Sally Morgan, *My Place* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987), 97ff.

⁸¹Mark St Leon, "Celebrated at first, then implied and finally denied: The erosion of Aboriginal identity in circus, 1851–1960," *Aboriginal History* 32 (2008): 63–81, quotation on 75.

⁸²Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Ethnographic Burlesque," 175.

⁸³JW Bleakley quoted in Scott and Laurie, "Colonialism on Display," 53, image of young Aboriginal woman dressed as a maid on 51.

⁸⁴See Michael Aird, *Portraits of Our Elders* (Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1993) and Conor, "'Blackfella Missus,'" 231–236 for some discussion of these problems.

⁸⁵Hunter, "Rough Riding"; see also Charlotte Macdonald, *Strong, Beautiful and Modern: National Fitness in Britain, New Zealand, Australia and Canada, 1935–1960* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2011).

⁸⁶Huggins, "White Aprons"; Inara Walden, "'That was slavery days': Aboriginal Domestic Servants in New South Wales in the Twentieth Century," *Labour History*, 69 (November 1995): 196–208; Anna Cole, Victoria Haskins, Fiona Paisley,

eds., *Uncommon Ground: White Women in Aboriginal History* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005); Haskins, "From the Centre."

⁸⁷A wonderful exception to this invisibility is Broome *Aboriginal Victorians*.

⁸⁸See for example Katie Holmes, *Spaces in Her Day: Australian Women's Diaries of the 1920s and 30s* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1995); Kathryn M Hunter, *Father's Right-Hand Man: Women on Australian Family Farms in the Age of Federation, 1880s–1920s* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2004); Woollacott, *To Try her Fortune*; Conor, *Spectacular Modern Woman*; Helen Bennett, "Being Modern: Living in flats in inter-war Brisbane," *Queensland Review* 13, no. 2 (2006): 35–48.

⁸⁹Hunter, *Father's Right-Hand Man*.

⁹⁰An exception to this focus is Scott and Laurie, "Colonialism on display."

⁹¹See for example John McQuilton, *Rural Australia and the Great War: From Tarrawingee to Tangambalanga*, (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2001); Kate Darian-Smith and Sarah Wills, "From Queen of Agriculture to Miss Showgirl: Embodying Rurality in Twentieth-Century Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies* 71 (December 2001): 17–31; Richard Waterhouse, *A Vision Splendid: A Social and Cultural History of Rural Australia* (Fremantle: Curtin University Press, 2005).

⁹²The exceptions to this are the work of Richard Broome and Alick Jackomos on tent boxing and sideshow alley. See Richard Broome, "Enduring moments of Aboriginal dominance," *Labour History* 69 (November 1995): 171–187; Richard Broome, "Theatres of Power: Tent boxing circa 1910–70," *Aboriginal History* 20 (1996): 1–23; Broome and Jackomos, *Sideshow Alley*.

⁹³Diane Barwick, "A Little More than Kin: Regional Affiliation and Group Identity among Aboriginal Migrants in Melbourne" (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1963); Judy Inglis "One Hundred Years at Point McLeay, South Australia," *Mankind: Official Journal of the Anthropological Societies of Australia*, 5, no.12 (1962): 503–507; Rani Kerin, "'Mixed Up in a Bit of Do-Goodery': Judy Inglis, Activist Anthropology and Aboriginal History," *History and Anthropology* 18, no. 4 (2007): 427–442.

⁹⁴Ann Jackson-Nakano, *Kamberri: a history from the records of aboriginal families in the Canberra-Queanbeyan district and surrounds, 1820–1927, and historical overview 1928–2001* (Canberra, Aboriginal Studies Press, 2001); Clinton Walker, *Buried Country: the story of Aboriginal country music* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 2000); Marcus Breen, ed., *Our Place, Our Music* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1989). For a study of a more recent period see Anna Haebich, *Spinning the Dream: Assimilation in Australia, 1950–1970* (Fremantle: Fremantle Press, 2008).