

John Gilroy, Jo Ragen, Helen Meekosha, 'Decolonizing the dynamics of media power and media representation between 1830 and 1930: Australian Indigenous[1] peoples with disability' in Katie Ellis, Gerard Goggin, and Beth Haller (eds.), *Routledge Companion to Disability and Media* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

Decolonising the dynamics of media power and media representation between 1830 and 1930: Australian Indigenous peoples with disability

John Gilroy, Jo Ragen and Helen Meekosha

ABSTRACT

Indigenous Australians have experienced the horrific consequences of European invasion and colonisation. Some of these consequences include wars, geographic displacement and attempted genocide. Both the high prevalence and experience of disability among Indigenous peoples remain directly linked to the events that followed European invasion. Critical Disability Studies and Media Studies can investigate the process of decolonisation. This chapter is cross disciplinary in so far as we are concerned with the representation of Indigenous people in the mass media and decolonising Indigenous disability. We examine data collected from an analysis of the print media during the colonial period; that is, representation of “disabled” Indigenous people in mainstream newspapers during the first 100 years of the press from 1830. We use Martin Nakata’s Indigenous Standpoint Theory and Decolonising frameworks to deconstruct and analyse the material collected.

INTRODUCTION

The newspaper industry is one of the oldest forms of news media in Australia. Many media studies scholars state that newspapers are an important source to understand how “our history can be accessed and interpreted.”¹ Recent media studies involving Indigenous² peoples³ and people with disability⁴ have shown that the news media provides a source of data for exploring how minority groups have been portrayed and treated within Australian popular culture since colonisation.

The news media and more recently social media play a vital social function in the dissemination of local and national information via radio, newspapers, magazine, and television and more recently the Internet. News media provides information for local citizens, migrants and foreigners about issues pertaining to the economy, politics, fashion and local and national cultural identity.⁵ The centralised ownership of the news media enables the industry to maintain its stronghold and limitless reach, representing and influencing the public discourse on matters the media deem important. It is for this reason the news media is often described as essential for “collective identity formation” in nation states around the world.⁶

The links between colonisation and disability amongst Indigenous populations have been well documented.⁷ Schofield and Gilroy⁸ define colonisation as a process of coerced alienation of Indigenous peoples that serves the interests of the growing Western metropole. Scholars have long argued that the Western metropole, through its Eurocentric lens, defined and categorised the “Cultural/Racial Other” (Indigenous/Aboriginal/Native) was *different* and *inferior* to white European races.⁹ Decolonisation on the other hand remains the “ongoing, radical resistance against colonialism that includes struggles for land, redress, self-determination, healing historical trauma, cultural continuance, and reconciliation.”¹⁰

The World Health Organisation reports there are around 370 million Indigenous peoples in at least 70 countries around the world.¹¹ In Australia, Indigenous people represent over half a million people,¹² around three per cent of the nation's population. When the British invasion of Australia occurred in 1788, the colonial elite explored and stole the lands and resources of Indigenous peoples. The British elite did not respect Indigenous peoples as humans or as custodians. The ensuing wars between the British elite and the Indigenous peoples persisted for over a century. Indigenous peoples were subject to kidnap, rape and murder in the name of European imperialism.¹³ In effect, Indigenous peoples are among the unhealthiest and most disadvantaged people in Australia.¹⁴

Australian Indigenous peoples with disability have received limited attention in disability studies and media studies. To the authors' knowledge, there is no known research on how Indigenous peoples with disabilities were portrayed and treated in the colonial news media in any settler society. Taking a decolonising approach to disability studies involves creating a space to understand the present situation of Indigenous people from the perspective of Indigenous people themselves. This approach involves a deconstruction of the embodiment of social, political, economic, cultural processes of colonisation. Part of the process of a decolonising inquiry is to critique western constructs and conceptions of disability and ill health.

By using Australia as a case study, this chapter aims to illustrate the representation of Indigenous people with a disability in the print mass-media throughout the first hundred years of newspaper publications in Australia from 1830s to 1930s. This period was chosen as it followed the colonial government's relaxing censorship of the news media.¹⁵ This study is positioned within a decolonising methodological framework, building upon the works undertaken by Gilroy¹⁶ and Gilroy, Donnelly, Colmar and Parmenter.¹⁷ The research demonstrates how early media reporting played an important role in supporting colonial power structures such as the courts and policing, early welfare institutions and institution systems such as prisons. It also shows how the use of disability tropes in the print press supported discourses of indigenous inferiority and backwardness.

Print News Media and Minority Groups

Following the British invasion of Australia in 1788, many settlers migrated away from the city regions to set up large horticultural and agricultural outstations, becoming one of the primary industries for Australia's growing colonial economy. The first newspaper, the *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, was published in March 1803 to improve the distribution of government official information throughout the colonies and outstations. The *Australian* (not the current newspaper with that title), the *Monitor* and the *Tasmanian and Port Dalrymple Advertiser* were the first known published provincial newspapers in Australia.¹⁸ Australia's longest published newspaper, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, was first published in 1831, becoming the first popular daily newspaper in Australia.

The European elite brought cultural values of *normative health* and *human functioning*, directly connected to Western biomedicine and free-market capitalism. The *eugenics movement*, a Eurocentric set of beliefs, ideals and practices that aims to improve the genetic quality of the human population, was well advanced in Westernised countries between 1880s and the mid-twentieth century and overlapped the period under study in this chapter.

In Australia, many institutions and asylums were established under law, such as the Queensland Benevolent Asylums Ward Act 1861, and "Lunatic Persons" became the responsibility of the prison system during the late 1800s. Yet many Indigenous peoples regard the Western biomedical approach to pathologically labeling and categorising people by their perceived *disabilities* as part of an attempt to further alienate Indigenous peoples.¹⁹ Much research suggests that there exists no word in any Indigenous communities' language equivalent to the English words "disability" or "impairment."²⁰

Media scholars have used framing theory to demonstrate how information about Indigenous people influences and frames public attitudes and places Indigenous people within a particular "field of meaning." Marcia Langton's²¹ essay on the representation of Australian Indigenous

peoples argues that the news media was used as a tool to create an *imagined community* of a “white Australia” as *normative*, reflecting the hegemony of eugenics. For example, Figure 1 shows how one newspaper, *The Bulletin*, represented and supported the capture and trading of Indigenous peoples as free labor for the colonialists’ farms and homesteads.



Figure 1 Cartoon depicting a slave trader luring buyers to his “niggers for hire” stand, *The Bulletin*, 1886.

Indigenous peoples are often represented in the context of “civil disorder” to generate a *moral panic* about “race relations” in Australia. Many political and social issues, such as land rights, welfare policy, alcohol, crime and unemployment have been portrayed in a way that represents and treats Indigenous peoples as a *social problem*.²² Even though Indigenous peoples’ voices are included in some news stories, their views are often obscured or cordoned off by the views of White, middle-class professional peoples and organisations. Bullimore²³ describes this issue well:

As a result of this domination, interpretations and evaluations of news events are routinely embedded in the ideology of the White elite. When ethnic or minority voices are heard in

the media—if they are heard at all—they are found to be less credible than elite speakers, such as police and government officials.

Likewise, Ellis and Goggin²⁴ review of media research on disability in the news media shows that people with disability were portrayed as a social problem in similar ways to Indigenous people. Zahang and Haller²⁵ observed that the negative representation of people with disability in the mass media contributes to their oppression by reinforcing existing, or creating new, stereotypes and stigmas associated with disability and impairment. Thus, disability stereotypes that medicalise, patronise and dehumanise people with disabilities perpetuated in the mass media aim to normalise hegemonic ideologies. These objectifying representations and depictions of people with disability contribute to their social isolation, thus reinforce the hegemonic values of ableism as normative.²⁶

Critical Disability Studies at the Cultural Interface

Relying on newspaper publications in the period in question inevitably limits our analysis to material written only by the White affluent classes. However, these publications in the hands of the powerful elite frame popular meanings about Indigenous peoples and are thus an important source of information.

One of this chapter's authors claims "disability studies' differentiation between chronic illness, impairment and disability cannot usefully explain the contemporary lived experience of indigenous peoples."²⁷ Scholars²⁸ have demonstrated that Disability Studies regularly assume universality in their middle-class colonialist standpoints, thus imposing normativity of White non-disabled bodies. By adopting Indigenous research and decolonising methodologies we critically deconstruct how Indigenous people with disability were represented and treated at the cultural interface of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and critically reflect the implications this had for Indigenous peoples with disabilities.

The recent turn to Critical Disability Studies seeks to be “self-aware of its own historicity” and “engage in dialogue among cultures” while undergoing a process of intellectual decolonisation.²⁹ This requires developing methodological frameworks that privilege Indigenous peoples and are developed either by or in cooperation with Indigenous peoples. An example of this paradigm shift is work by Gilroy³⁰ that explores the applicability of Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST) in disability studies. IST is not an “Indigenous” way of doing research. Rather it is a researcher’s positionality that prioritises the personal experiences of Indigenous peoples in the research process.³¹

As Indigenous (author one) and non-Indigenous with disability (author two and three) scholars, we position ourselves at the Cultural Interface as defined by Martin Nakata.³² In previous papers, Gilroy³³ has demonstrated that critically exploring the cultural interface helps us understand why many problems experienced by Indigenous people with disability have persisted for many decades. The cultural interface is the domain where the trajectories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples’ histories, cultures, ideologies and practices regarding disability and impairment intersect creating the social environments that impact on Indigenous peoples’ lives. The cultural interface is a metaphysical world where Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples constantly interact and negotiate matters pertaining only to Indigenous peoples’ lives. Nakata³⁴ states that “for in this space there are so many interwoven, competing and conflicting discourses that distinguishing traditional from non-traditional in the day-to-day is difficult to sustain even if one were in a state of permanent reflection.”

Indigenous People with Disability in the Colonial Press

The Australian National Library’s Trove digitised newspaper database was searched for Australian newspaper articles published between the years 1830s and 1930s. This period was selected as it marks one century of the “freedom of the press” following the government lifting of press censorship in 1824.³⁵ It was also the period when numerous newspapers were published on a weekly basis and witnessed Australia becoming a Federation of States under the British Commonwealth in 1901. Near the end of the nineteenth century there were 599 metropolitan daily

and weekly, suburban and country newspapers and magazines published in Australia. Of these, 466 were published in country areas.³⁶

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 shows the key search-words used in the analysis and their meanings. The articles selected used disability terms in relation to Indigenous peoples. The search terms were obtained from the literature and our lifelong experiential knowledge on disability and Aboriginal affairs. The meanings and synonyms of these terms were searched in a 19th Century English dictionary to ensure the meanings are the same in the research period. Given that there were no adequate Australian published dictionaries for that period, the Oxford dictionaries published in London were used for this study. Many of the articles obtained have used more than one of these search terms.

Table 1.1: Disability database search-words

Search term	Meaning
Asylum	An institution for receiving maintaining, and so far, as possible ameliorating the condition of persons suffering from bodily defects, mental maladies, or other misfortunes.
Blind	No, or limited, sense of visual capabilities and sight
Cripple	One who creeps, halts or limps; one who is partially or wholly deprived of the use of one or more of his limbs; a lame person.
Deaf	Lacking the sense of hearing; insensible to sounds.
Deformed/ deformity	To mar the natural form or shape of; put out of shape; disfigure, as by malformation of a limb or some other part of the body
Dumb	Blind and deaf; the two words are connected. The origin sense being then “dull of perception.”
Feeble	Lacking strength; lacking capacity for the forcible action or resistance; weak; specifically reduced to a state of weakness as by sickness or age.
Handicap	To place at a disadvantage by the imposition of any embarrassment, impediment, or disability.
Imbecile	Mentally feeble; fatuous; having mental faculties undeveloped or greatly impaired.
Impaired	To make worse; diminish in quantity, value, excellence strength, or any other desirable quality; deteriorate weaken enfeeble as to impair the health or character.
Infirm	Be infirm or sick; to weaken enfeeble; not sound in health; impaired in health or fatality.
Insane	Unsound in the mind; unsound or deranged in the mind.
Lame	Bruised or maimed; crippled or disabled by injury to or defect of a limb or limbs.
Lunatic	Mad; moonstruck, insane; affect by lunacy; periodically insane, with lucid intervals; crazy.

Mental	Belonging to or characteristic of the intellect; as the mental power or faculties.
Mute	Dumb; incapable of utterance; not having the power of speech.
Paralyse/ paralyze	To render helpless, useless, or ineffective, as if by paralysis.
Physical Defect	A recognised defect of the physical body; diagnosed defect
Stupid	In a state of stupor; having the faculties deadened or dulled; stupefied, either permanently or temporarily; lacking ordinary activity of mind.

Table 1.2: Indigenous database search-words

Search term	Meaning
Aboriginal	The first inhabitants; pertaining to Aborigines.
Aboriginary	An Aboriginal inhabitant
Aborigine	The primitive inhabitants of a country; the people living in a country at the earliest period of which anything is known; the original fauna and flora of a given geographical area.
Black	A member of one of the dark-coloured races; a negro or other dark-skinned person.
Blackfellow	A black person; a negro; An Aboriginal inhabitant
Blacky	A black person; a negro
Darky/ie	A human being with dark coloured skin.
Gin	An Australian native woman; an old woman generally.
Indigenous	Born or originating in a particular place or country.
Native	Of indigenous origin or growth; not exotic or of foreign origin or production belonging by birth;
Nigger	A native of the West Indies or one of the Australian Aborigines.
Piccaninnies	A baby; a child; especially, the child of a member of any negroid race.

A total of 75 articles were obtained. Five articles were excluded as the term “native” was used to describe the birthplace of a European, such as “a native of London”, rather than an Indigenous person. Four articles were excluded due to the article text being unreadable. A total of 66 newspaper articles were included in this study. Table 2 below shows the number of newspaper articles found for each decade from 1830. The largest number of matching articles were published in 1880s and 1890s.

Table 2: Number of articles obtained from the database search per decade

Decade	Number of articles
1830s	0
1840s	1
1850s	2

1860s	5
1870s	4
1880s	15
1890s	22
1900s	7
1910s	2
1920s	7
1930s	1
TOTAL	66

The main theme identified from the analysis of the news articles examined focused on labeling and categorising Indigenous peoples within a Eurocentric medical framework. The articles commonly used the following phrases to describe an *ab-normal Indigenous person*:

- “Aboriginal cripple”³⁷
- “old lubra³⁸ who was blind”³⁹
- “old black cripple”⁴⁰
- “the gin was a cripple”⁴¹
- “imbecile Aboriginal”⁴²
- “partially imbecile Aboriginal native”⁴³
- “old blind native woman”⁴⁴
- “deaf and dumb Aboriginal”⁴⁵
- “The native was an old helpless inoffensive cripple”⁴⁶
- “blind bobby”⁴⁷

There are five elements to this main theme presented under the headings below: disability a consequence of Indigenous inferiority; pathways to welfare; protection; criminalisation; institutionalisation.

1. Disability a consequence of Indigenous inferiority

This first element framed the prevalence and incidence of impairment in Indigenous communities as a consequence of the Indigenous peoples’ “inferiority/inability” to prevent, or adapt to, the European invasion. Disability was discussed as a consequence of the frontier wars during the first

century of European invasion.⁴⁸ For example, one article⁴⁹ stated that “... one native who was humpbacked and a cripple for life, as a result of injuries, understood locally to have been inflicted some time ago by a white man by means of a tomahawk.” Some articles⁵⁰ presented statistics on the prevalence of impairments in the local Indigenous communities. Similarly, an interview with John Alce⁵¹ about the implications of European invasion on Indigenous peoples made the following statement about the spread of diseases and represents Indigenous peoples’ approaches to impairment and disability as inferior and archaic:

The ranks of the island natives, numbering between two and three hundred, have been decimated by a dire scourge, the effects of which are still visible on both old and young. Mr. Markey gives a harrowing description of some of the sufferers, who in their appalling ignorance are indifferent to the consequences of the disease. With these unfortunates, as well as seven blind men and twelve deaf and dumb children...

A letter from a Government Minister⁵² published in 1889 reported that “new-born children are *frequently* killed by their mothers—of twins the female, or if one sex the weaker, also all the children who are feeble or cripples and many bastards.” Some articles mocked Indigenous traditional approaches to defining and responding to impairments. For example:

A well-known figure in the streets of Palmerston for many years past—Cripple Jimmy, a Larrakeyah native—died suddenly ... Jimmy’s sudden taking off will not tend to increase their confidence in the white man’s methods of healing. This is to be regretted, as the distrust entails much needless suffering. Had Jimmy chosen to see the doctor earlier, he might still have been alive, and as well as his deformity would ever permit him to be.⁵³

Some articles discussed the Indigenous cultural approaches to supporting Indigenous people that were experiencing the physical effects of illness and disease.⁵⁴ For example, Leckie⁵⁵ published a newspaper article titled “Black Magic”, which mocked and ridiculed Indigenous healers as inferior.

2. *Pathways to welfare*

Many articles used impairment to frame Indigenous people as dependents, unproductive and a resource burden on colonial farmsteads and outstations. Whilst constructing Indigenous people as a resource burden, many articles reported on the allocation of “government rations” and “handouts” to Indigenous people with impairments as fulfilling their Christian duties.⁵⁶ Some colonial farm-station managers published opinion pieces to voice their dissatisfaction of owners and managers of colonial outstations who provided compensation to Indigenous people with impairment in order to retain the services of Indigenous peoples as laborers.⁵⁷ An outstation manager’s letter to the Editor⁵⁸ linked the “slaughter” of Indigenous peoples to the allocation of welfare to Indigenous peoples with disabilities on their outstation farmstead:

... when they [Indigenous people] are on the station it is cheaper to feed them than to let them help themselves ... this mob of cousins, aunts, blind uncles etc, have to be looked after [by the station] so as to retain the services of two or three good ones [Indigenous people], of which there are still a few left in spite of the slaughter there has been lately.

The authors of these articles connected the prevalence of impairments to their desires of capitalism to expand the global colonial empire within a Christian philosophy. Below is an example from a farm-station manager’s letter to the editor⁵⁹ expressing his dissatisfaction on how the government is treating Indigenous peoples with disabilities:

Frequently I observed old, decrepid [*sic*] natives and absolutely blind, of no possible use to the station—useless and only waiting for the grave to receive them—all kindly treated, well looked after, generously fed, and provided with rugs at the station’s cost. I will not say that there are not now and then instances of unnecessary hardship and gross cruelty inflicted on the natives by their “bosses,” just as there are instances of unreasoning cruelties inflicted in the various social strata of civilisation.

The settlers were described as being generous by fulfilling their “duties” of Christianity. In effect, the handouts given to Indigenous peoples were a means of pacifying the Indigenous peoples and make the settlers feel like they were fulfilling their duties. Thus the violence of colonisation was immune to scrutiny both through the pathologisation of indigenous people and by the provision of minimal levels of welfare.⁶⁰

3. Protection

The articles represented the Indigenous peoples as tractable and in need of protection and position, the Europeans as their “protectors.” For example, in an article titled “the last of their race”⁶¹ the author discussed how Indigenous peoples were removed from their traditional lands and relocated to farms and out-stations.

...the small remnant of the Aborigines of Van Diemen’s Land have been withdrawn from Flinders Island ... They consist of 18 adult men, 22 adult women, 5 boys and 5 girls ...one is nearly blind, one is imbecile, that of the remaining five ... two of them having been pretty regularly employed as boatmen, and one having for years done the duty of cowherd, with a steadiness which would have been praise-worthy in a man bred to labor. They have all lived about in civilised habits.

The articles that discussed “protection” often represented the Europeans as the “saviors” of Indigenous people.⁶² Some articles referenced how Indigenous geographic displacement is impacting on Indigenous peoples’ livelihood. For example, an opinion article⁶³ from 1898 similarly stated that:

... the government ... should protect them [Indigenous people] from suffering starvation through legislation. Game [wild fauna] is scarce in the district, many of the blacks are old and decrepit, some even blind ... as their protector [government] should recommend that steps be taken to ameliorate their condition.

Protection and welfare worked hand in hand. An opinion article in the *Western Australian*⁶⁴ stated:

... Europeans who take a sympathising interest in the race of human beings whose primitive habits and wretchedness we are bound, as their superior, to improve and ameliorate so far as we are able. It has been a mistake of longstanding on the part of the government—a mistake which I have long vainly endeavored to have removed—the neglect, socially speaking, of the feeble, the sick and the blind amongst our Aborigines.

4. *Criminalisation of Indigeneity and disability*

Indigenous people with disabilities who were involved in the criminal justice system featured strongly in the material collected. Some Indigenous people with disabilities⁶⁵ who were involved in the criminal justice system were identified by their impairment, such as “deaf Johnny, an attempt to commit a capital offence”⁶⁶ or “mad Tommy,”⁶⁷ or by both their impairment and indigeneity, such as “Aborigine declared insane.”⁶⁸ For example, an article about a murder⁶⁹ stated that “there was no sign of lameness or any other physical defect about [the accused].” An article titled “half-caste Aborigine acquitted”⁷⁰ reported that “the inspector general of the insane (Dr Bently) said that Johnnie was sane on August 23 but must have been insane on the date of the murder.” Similarly, an article titled “Aborigine declared insane”⁷¹ stated that “Thomas Shaw, the half-caste Aborigine... has been classified as insane at the time of the tragedy.”

Prisons were said to have an “invasion of Aborigines and lunatics.”⁷² Indigenous people with disability who were involved in the criminal justice system were also represented as dependent on handouts from settler communities. For example, a magistrate stated in an opinion piece⁷³ that some Indigenous people with disability were committing crimes, such as theft, because of disadvantage. He gave the following account of a convicted Indigenous person:

I was resident magistrate of Bunbury ... I know the native, Banyan. He came to my house with other natives in 1858. He ... was partially deformed. ... he was brought here into court, and appeared helpless and decrepid [*sic*]. ... [and] began to draw rations as a sick native in 1859....

Treatment reflected the use of the medical model of “impairment” in the criminal justice system. The type and severity of a person’s impairment were assessed and diagnosed under the European medical model of impairment and functioning. For example, two news articles report⁷⁴ of a Court

hearing in 1897. One article⁷⁵ described “the case of an Aboriginal girl ‘Bluey’ ... who has the appearance of an imbecile [who] was remanded for medical examination.” Similarly, a report⁷⁶ of a convicted Indigenous person stated that “the jury returned a verdict of manslaughter, but stated that it believed that the accused was insane at the time he committed the deed.”

Indigenous people with disability in the criminal justice system were discriminated against, humiliated and disrespected and they were neither treated as equal to an able-bodied Indigenous person or a European. An opinion piece⁷⁷ mocked an Indigenous person with impairment who provided evidence in a criminal court hearing against a European suspected of property theft:

Can it be possible that the South Australian Government accept the evidence of Aborigines in a court of justice! I notice in your police reports that a blackfellow gave evidence in a portmanteau stealing case, and (tell it not in Gath) that darkie was deaf and dumb! Why, he might point to a portmanteau and mean a saddle, or a pair of boots, or any other article made of leather.

Another incident in a court setting demonstrated how an Indigenous person was not properly supported in providing evidence against a European who was suspected of selling alcohol to Indigenous people. The author of the article described this event as “funny”:

One of the funniest things in the way of Police Court work was the attempt made on Monday last to convict an Aboriginal grog-seller on the “evidence” of a deaf and dumb black-fellow, who (to add to the singularity of the thing) had his peculiar signs and antics interpreted by a Chinaman. Mr. Knight stood it for a while, but when the ludicrous nature of the joke had been played out he advised the police to look round for testimony that was more reliable. A deaf and dumb blackfellow assisted by a Chinaman in an Australian police court is not often met with.⁷⁸

The criminal justice system openly discriminated against Indigenous people with impairment due to cultural and language differences⁷⁹:

...the jury found the accused was unable to understand the proceedings owing to his ignorance of English. They also found him to be insane. He was committed to the lunatic asylum during the Governor's pleasure.

The police and military institutions recruited many Indigenous people as police officers to maintain law and order within Indigenous communities. This process of divide and rule was also a means of controlling Indigenous resistance against the spread of European rule. A newspaper article⁸⁰ from 1865 reported that "a black-fellow—a cripple—had left Mr Dutton's station, and was shortly afterwards met by the black police ... [and] was immediately shot dead." Similarly, an article⁸¹ described how an Indigenous person with impairment was framed for a crime:

the case of Nabbagee Tom ... a poor old cripple, who could hardly speak or hear, brought down from the North West because a smart native assistant, Jim Crow, had knocked an unintelligible confession out of him. Jim Crow and some white police, go out in a searching party. They see two blacks, and gallop them down.

5. Institutionalisation of Indigeneity and impairment

Analysis of the data suggested that the institutionalisation of Indigenous peoples with disabilities was discussed in three ways.

Firstly, the articles reported the advancements of the psychological sciences and the impact these "advances" had for Indigenous people. Indigenous peoples who were accused or convicted of a crime were assessed by a medical professional in psychological sciences. Indigenous people with impairment were imprisoned under the Insanity Act 1884 for people regarded as "insane."

Wallinjera an Aboriginal belonging to the Uranna tribe ... inquiries showed that the accused was once in Woogaroo, and he was still subject to delusions. The judge then took evidence on the point as to accused's sanity at the present moment, the principal witness being Dr Voss; and the jury, after fifteen minutes consideration, found him insane. The judge then directed the accused to be kept in strict custody in Rockhampton Gaol ... until death with as provided for by the Insanity Act of 1884.⁸²

Many Indigenous people with impairment were institutionalised in “Destitute Asylums” or “Mental Asylums.” Some articles reported on the number of “asylum inmates” by Indigeneity, age, sex and type of impairment.⁸³

Secondly, segregating Indigenous peoples onto reserves, outstations or missions. This practice is linked to the power to “protect” (category three above) Indigenous people with impairment. Many organisations established to “protect” and represent Indigenous peoples, such as the Aborigines' Friends' Society, reported on the Indigenous “inmates” (age, sex, impairment etc) at some missions. Many journalists and writers⁸⁴ of the time reported on their “travels” to Indigenous missions. For example, a letter to the editor⁸⁵ stated that “these reserves should be under the control of specially qualified white protectors ... [to enable Indigenous people to care for] the old, the lame or the blind.”

Thirdly, some Indigenous people who were diagnosed as either “deaf”, “dumb” or “blind” were placed in the Deaf and Dumb Institution or the Deaf and Dumb and Blind Institute.⁸⁶ During the 1890s, these two institutions reported on their services and “inmates” in the print media. The Deaf and Dumb Institution⁸⁷ would only accept Indigenous people if the Aborigines Protection Board would allocate funding.

The Future of Disability and the News Media

The field of Disability Studies has until recently neglected the people with disability outside of the non-metropole. This chapter is a contribution to the project of decolonising disability studies by critically analysing the representations of Australian Indigenous peoples with disabilities in the colonial print media. This was achieved using Martin Nakata's standpoint theory, the Cultural Interface and supports the new paradigm emerging from Critical Disability Studies.

Our analysis of the colonial newspapers has identified five main discourses in the representation of Indigenous people with disability within the theme of Eurocentric medical framework.

1. *Disability a consequence of Indigenous inferiority*
2. *Pathways to welfare*
3. *Protection*
4. *Criminalisation of Indigeneity and impairment*
5. *Institutionalisation of Indigeneity and impairment*

The findings of this study have implications for disability and indigenous media studies. Our findings show that the Australian media was used as a tool in the first 100 years of settlement to impose a white able-bodied normalcy and racial superiority in a colonised nation state. The print press acted to support white power structures and non-Indigenous occupation of Indigenous lands and resources. The study adds support to Gilroy's and Donnelly's⁸⁸ claim that disability research inherently serves the interests of the non-Aboriginal affluent classes by falsely justifying "whiteness" and "ability" as normative. Gilroy⁸⁹ stated that:

There are volumes of knowledge, a whole epistemological library in fact, on Indigenous people with a disability. This knowledge is not owned by Indigenous people, rather this library operates as a resource for non-Indigenous researchers and government decision makers to legitimate themselves as the controllers and bearers of the "truth" on disability.

During the period under consideration, the media helped create and portray an *imagined* “superior-being” (White/ male/ European/ able-bodied) and a “non-superior-being” (Black/ Indigenous/ disabled/ impaired-bodied). This was done in two ways. Firstly, the Indigenous peoples were “culturally othered” as the inferior human race when contrasted to predominantly European communities. As such, eugenic philosophies influenced both media and public policy that encouraged the institutionalization of impaired persons. Professionals (white middle classes, medically trained men) were positioned as experts to determine the inclusion or exclusion of “defectives” influencing the removal of “defectives” from society. Impairment and indigeneity counted as “defective” within this dominant hegemony.

The findings have implications for future research in critical disability studies, media studies and colonial history. The findings support that we need to read disability differently⁹⁰ not only in texts but in the media. The findings supports Meekosha’s claim that “we cannot meaningfully separate the disabled subaltern from the colonised subaltern.”⁹¹ The articles authors represented in this study were focused on labeling and categorising Indigenous peoples on the basis of their Indigeneity and impairments. This was done in the context of European “superiority.”

The newspaper articles categorised, represented and treated *the Indigenous* and *the disabled-bodied* as one *embodied identity*. As such, Indigenous peoples with impairments were “doubly labeled” within a White *medicalised* and *racialised* system that *inscribed and normalised Indigeneity* and *functioning*. The articles represented *Indigeneity* on the basis of racialised stereotypical body features, such as skin colour, and the practice of “traditional” cultures and languages. This double labeling resulted in the *criminalisation* and *institutionalisation* of Indigenous people with a disability as a “social problem” to be addressed within taken-for-granted Western practices, thus reinforcing the normalcy of colonisation.

Notes

-
- ¹ V. Isaacs and R. Kirkpatrick, *Two hundred years of Sydney newspapers: a short history* (Richmond, NSW: Rural Press, 2003).
- ² We use the term Indigenous in this paper to include both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- ³ Melissa Sweet, Luke Pearson and Pat Dudgeon, “@IndigenousX: A case study of community-led innovation in digital media,” *Media International Australia* 149, no.1 (2013): 104–111; Kerry McCallum, Lisa Waller and Michael Meadows, “Raising the Volume: Indigenous Voices in News Media and Policy,” *Media International Australia* 142, no.1 (2012): 101–111; Marcia Langton, *Well I heard it on the Radio and I saw it on the Television* (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 1993).
- ⁴ Katie Ellis and Gerard Goggin, *Disability and the media* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ P. Smith and T. Phillips, “Collective belonging and mass media consumption: unraveling how technological medium and cultural genre shape the national imaginings of Australians,” *The Sociological Review* 54, no. 4 (2006): 818–846.
- ⁷ J. Gilroy et al., “Conceptual framework for policy and research development with Indigenous persons with disability,” *Journal of Australian Aboriginal Studies* no. 2 (2013): 42–58; H. Meekosha, “Decolonising disability: thinking and acting globally,” *Disability & Society* 26, no. 6 (2011): p. 667–682; D. Hollinsworth, “Decolonizing Indigenous disability in Australia,” *Disability & Society* 28 (2013): 601–615; J. A. King, M. Brough and M. Knox, “Negotiating disability and colonisation: the lived experience of Indigenous Australians with a disability,” *Disability & Society* 29 (2014): 738–750.
- ⁸ T. Schofield and J. Gilroy, “Indigeniety and health”, in *A Sociological Approach to Health Determinants*, ed. T. Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 99–122.
- ⁹ D. Hollinsworth, “Decolonizing Indigenous disability in Australia” *Disability & Society*, 28 (2013): 601–615; L. T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999); E. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1995); S. Grech, “Decolonising Eurocentric disability studies: why colonialism matters in the disability and global South debate,” *Social Identities* 21, no.1 (2015): p. 6–21.
- ¹⁰ C. Greensmith, “Pathologizing Indigeneity in the Caledonia ‘Crisis,’” *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 1, no.2 (2012): 14–42.
- ¹¹ E. Alderete, *The Health of Indigenous People* Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1999; United Nations, *State of the World’s Indigenous Peoples* (New York: United Nations, 2009).
- ¹² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *The health and welfare of Australia’s aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: an overview* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011).
- ¹³ R. Broome, *Aboriginal Australians: a history since 1788*, (4th ed.), (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2010); H. Reynolds, *Dispossession: Black Australians and white invaders*, Australian experience, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989).
- ¹⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *The health and welfare of Australia’s aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*.

-
- ¹⁵ Isaacs and Kirkpatrick, *Two hundred years of Sydney newspapers*; R. Jolly, *Media ownership and regulation: a chronology Part one: from print to radio days and television nights* (Canberra: Parliamentary Library, 2016), 2.
- ¹⁶ J. Gilroy, "The theory of the cultural interface and Indigenous people with disabilities in New South Wales," *Balayi: Culture, law and colonialism*, 10 (2009): 44–59; J. Gilroy, "The participation of aboriginal persons with disability in disability services in New South Wales, Australia," (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2012).
- ¹⁷ Gilroy et al., "Conceptual framework for policy and research development."
- ¹⁸ Isaacs and Kirkpatrick, *Two hundred years of Sydney newspapers*.
- ¹⁹ Gilroy et al., "Conceptual framework for policy and research development;" Gilroy, "The theory of the cultural interface;" N. Thompson and C. Snow, *Disability and handicap among Aborigines of the Taree area of New South Wales* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1994); L. Gething, "A case study of Australian Indigenous people with disabilities," *Australian Disability Review*, 77 (1995): 77–87.
- ²⁰ Hollinsworth, "Decolonizing Indigenous disability in Australia;" Grech, "Decolonising Eurocentric disability studies."
- ²¹ Langton, *Well I heard it on the Radio*.
- ²² H. Sercombe, "The face of the criminal is aboriginal," *Journal of Australian Studies*, 19, no.43 (1995): 76–94.
- ²³ K. Bullimore, "Media dreaming: Representations of Aboriginality in Modern Australian Media," *Asia Pacific Media Educator* 6 (1999): 72–81.
- ²⁴ Ellis and Goggin, *Disability and the media*.
- ²⁵ L. Zhang and B. Haller, "Consuming Image: How Mass Media Impact the Identity of People with Disabilities," *Communication Quarterly* 61, no.3 (2013): 319–334.
- ²⁶ B. Haller, *Representing Disability in an Ableist World: Essays on Mass Media* (Louisville: The Advocado Press, 2010).
- ²⁷ Meekosha, *Decolonising disability*.
- ²⁸ Gilroy et al., "Conceptual framework for policy and research development;" Grech, "Decolonising Eurocentric disability studies;" H. Meekosha, "Decolonising Disability: Thinking and acting globally," *Disability & Society*, 26, no. 6 (2011): 667–681; Meekosha, "Decolonising Disability;" K. Soldatic, "Postcolonial reproductions: disability, indigeneity and the formation of the white masculine settler state of Australia," *Social Identities* 21, no.1 (2015): 53–68
- ²⁹ H. Meekosha and R. Shuttleworth, "What's so 'critical' about Critical Disability Studies?" *Australian Journal of Human Rights* 15, no. 1 (2009): 47–76.
- ³⁰ Gilroy, "The theory of the cultural interface;" Gilroy, "The participation of aboriginal persons."
- ³¹ N. Faulkner and J. Gilroy, "Encountering Narratives and Narrating Encounters: comparing and contrasting Kaupapa Maori and Indigenous Standpoint Theories," (paper presented at the *International Indigenous Development Research Conference* Auckland, NZ, November 25–28, 2014).
- ³² M. Nakata, "The cultural interface: An exploration of the intersection of western knowledge systems and Torres Strait Islander positions and experiences," (PhD thesis, James Cook University, 1997); M. Nakata, "Indigenous Knowledge and the Cultural Interface: underlying issues at the intersection of knowledge and information systems," *IFLA Journal* 28, no. 5–6 (2002): 281–291.
- ³³ Gilroy, "The theory of the cultural interface;" Gilroy, "The participation of aboriginal persons;" J. Gilroy, "History of Aboriginal people with disability in NSW: How are Aboriginal people with disability positioned and represented in the NSW disability services sector?" *Interaction: Special edition on Aboriginal people with disability* 24, no. 1 (2010): 6–29.

-
- ³⁴ Nakata, “Indigenous knowledge and the cultural interface.”
- ³⁵ W. McDonald, “Precursor to the Profile: the Character sketches in Colonial Australia,” in *Profile Pieces: Journalism and the ‘Human Interest’ Bias*, ed. Sue Joseph and Richard Lance Keeble (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2015), 47.
- ³⁶ H. Mayer, *The Press in Australia*, (Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 1964), 10, quoted in Rhonda Jolly, *Media ownership and regulation: a chronology Part one: from print to radio days and television nights* (Canberra: Parliamentary Library, 2016), 5.
- ³⁷ “Collision on the Western Railway,” *Empire*, September 30, 1868, 3; “The Courier,” *The Brisbane Courier*, September 25, 1868, 2.
- ³⁸ Lubra means “Aboriginal woman.”
- ³⁹ “Smallpox Among the Aborigines,” *The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser*, September 23, 1882, 2.
- ⁴⁰ “District News,” *The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser*, October 17, 1882, 7.
- ⁴¹ “News and Notes,” *The West Australian*, August 2, 1898, 4.
- ⁴² “Sifting, Local and Otherwise,” *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, August 28, 1891, 3.
- ⁴³ “News and Notes,” *The West Australian*, August 14, 1897, 5.
- ⁴⁴ “Dark Deeds in a Sunny Land,” *West Australian Sunday Times*, February 12, 1899, 1.
- ⁴⁵ “The Federal Land Tax Review,” *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, May 26, 1911, 2.
- ⁴⁶ “News and Notes,” *The West Australian*, June 3, 1892, 4.
- ⁴⁷ “Western Mail—Christmas Number,” *The West Australian*, November 28, 1898, 2.
- ⁴⁸ “Dark Deeds in a Sunny Land.”; “Albany Quarter Session,” *The West Australian*, June 25, 1880, 3.
- ⁴⁹ “The Forrest River Mission – Return of Mr T. Ormerod, An Interview,” *The West Australian*, February 11, 1899, 10.
- ⁵⁰ “The Advertiser,” *The South Australian Advertiser*, February 17, 1860, 2; “The Aborigines Question and Leprosy,” *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, March 16, 1900, 2; “News and Notes,” *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, August 24, 1900, 3; “Religious News,” *South Australian Register*, July 1, 1889, 3.
- ⁵¹ “Return of John Alce,” *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, January 6, 1923, 5.
- ⁵² “Religious News.”
- ⁵³ “News and Notes,” *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, February 12, 1904, 3.
- ⁵⁴ “News and Notes,” *The West Australian*, July 18, 1889, 2; “Died under Choloroform,” *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, February 12, 1904, 2.
- ⁵⁵ G. Leckie, “Black Magic,” *The Argus*, August 27, 1932, 7.
- ⁵⁶ “Our Natives,” *The West Australian*, July 17, 1883, 2; “News and Notes,” *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, May 25, 1889, 2.
- ⁵⁷ “A Day with North Queensland Blacks,” *The Brisbane Courier*, June 6, 1891, 6.
- ⁵⁸ “Correspondence,” *The West Australian*, December 13, 1892, 6.
- ⁵⁹ “The Native Question,” *Western Mail*, September 16, 1899, 67.
- ⁶⁰ Grech, “Decolonising Eurocentric disability studies.”
- ⁶¹ “The Last of their Race,” *The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News*, January 29, 1848, 4.
- ⁶² “Cases for the Aborigines' Protection Board,” *The West Australian*, February 16, 1897, 6; “North Australia,” *The Brisbane Courier*, September 18, 1926, 9.
- ⁶³ “Deplorable Condition of Aborigines,” *Warwick Argus*, May 14, 1898, 5.
- ⁶⁴ “Correspondence,” *The West Australian*, May 29, 1883, 3.

-
- ⁶⁵ “A Day with North Queensland Blacks,” *The Brisbane Courier*, June 6, 1891, 6; “Inquest,” *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, December 1, 1888, 3; “News and Notes,” *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, July 24, 1903, 3; “Tuesday, July,” *The West Australian*, July 10, 1883, 3; “Echuca,” *The Age*, December 13, 1924, 26.
- ⁶⁶ “The Brisbane Courier,” *The Brisbane Courier*, May 12, 1885, 4; “Queensland News,” *The Brisbane Courier*, May 7, 1885, 5.
- ⁶⁷ “Lubra's Throat Cut,” *The Argus* December 15, 1921, 11.
- ⁶⁸ “Aborigine Declared Insane,” *The Argus*, May 31, 1926, 19.
- ⁶⁹ “Supreme Court,” *The West Australian*, February 8, 1881, 3.
- ⁷⁰ “Murderer Insane—Half-caste Aborigine Acquitted,” *The Argus*, September 7, 1927, 27.
- ⁷¹ “Aborigine Declared Insane.”
- ⁷² “The Passing Show,” *The Argus*, May 4, 1918, 5.
- ⁷³ “Supreme Court—Civil Sittings,” *The Perth Gazette and the West Australian Times*, May 1, 1874, 3.
- ⁷⁴ “News and Notes,” *The West Australian*, August 14, 1897, 5; “In the City Police Court,” *The West Australian*, August 10, 1897, 7.
- ⁷⁵ “In the City Police Court.”
- ⁷⁶ “Lubra's Throat Cut,” *The Australasian*, December 17, 1921, 45.
- ⁷⁷ “A new Arrival's Jottings,” *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, February 8, 1879, 2.
- ⁷⁸ “Local Court—Truro,” *Kapunda Herald*, February 9, 1892, 3.
- ⁷⁹ “Intercolonial Telegrams,” *The West Australian*, March 3, 1893, 6.
- ⁸⁰ “Legislative Assembly,” *The Brisbane Courier*, August 5, 1865, 5.
- ⁸¹ “The Western Australian Times,” *The Western Australian Times*, October 12, 1875, 2.
- ⁸² “Rockhampton Supreme Court,” *Queensland Times, Ipswich and General Advertiser*, April 25, 1895, 3.
- ⁸³ “The Advertiser,” *The South Australian Advertiser*, January 31, 1859, 2; “The Sketcher: Notes of a Short Stay at Woogaroo,” in *The Queenslander*, August 3, 1872, 8.
- ⁸⁴ “Queensland Aborigines,” *The Brisbane Courier*, June 18, 1895, 2; “The Aborigines' Friends' Society,” *South Australian Weekly Chronicle*, August 14, 1858, 3; “The Aborigines mission,” *The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser*, August 8, 1882, 4; “An Enthusiastic Missionary,” *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, September 20, 1901, 3.
- ⁸⁵ “Queensland Aborigines,” *The Brisbane Courier*, June 18, 1895, 2.
- ⁸⁶ “Deaf Dumb and Blind Institution,” *The Brisbane Courier*, May 28, 1864, 4; June 25, 1896, 3; January 30, 1896, 2; January 30, 1896, 2; April 7, 1898, 7.
- ⁸⁷ “News and Notes,” *The West Australian*, September 17, 1897, 4.
- ⁸⁸ J. Gilroy and M. Donnelly, “Australian Indigenous People with Disability: Ethics and Standpoint Theory,” in *Disability in the Global South: The Critical Handbook*, ed. S. Grech and K. Soldatic, Cham: Springer, 2016, 545.
- ⁸⁹ Gilroy, “The participation of aboriginal persons,” 116.
- ⁹⁰ T. Titchkosky, *Reading and Writing Disability Differently: The Textured Life of Embodiment* (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2007).
- ⁹¹ Gilroy et al., “Conceptual framework for policy and research development.”