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White(washing) Australia and Nationalism Theory of Ernest Gellner

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Abstract: Nationalism theorist Ernest Gellner had always kept the formation of nation and that of race at bay. Race and nationalism are distinct for Gellner and are hence disassociated from each other. But, a more discerning reading of Gellner would make us think otherwise. In *Nations and Nationalisms* Gellner is of the view that a group of “entropy resistant” “blue people” always remain inassimilable within the national culture. It is this aporia in the otherwise homogenous nation that leads to the formation of nation within a nation. The Whiteness study theorists of Australia have hitherto overlooked this particular aspect of the Gellnerian thought while dealing with the formation of a White Australia. In my paper I would therefore like to substantiate the process of formation of a White Australian nation (through select examples, especially during the early stages of White nation formation by the settlers in Australia) through the theories of Ernest Gellner that talks about the attempt to subsume the “blue people” in the monolithic, modern, uppish, urban, nationalist discourse. In the process my paper would also reveal how the Indigenous Australians were positioned within the White Gellnerian nationalism that emerged from the invasion and “settlement” of Australia.

Keywords: Gellner, nation, nationalism, whiteness, race, White Australia

Racial bigotry ... went hand in hand with emerging Australian nationalism.
(Russell and Chubb 90)

By “colonial differences” I mean...(and I should perhaps say “the colonial difference”), the classification of the planet in the modern/colonial imaginary, by enacting coloniality of power, an energy and a machinery to transform differences into values. If racism is the matrix that permeates every domain of the imaginary of the modern/colonial world system, “Occidentalism” is the overarching metaphor around which colonial differences have been articulated and rearticulated through the changing hands in the history of capitalism and the changing ideologies motivated by imperial conflicts.
(Mignolo 13)

Indigenous author and activist Aileen Moreton-Robinson in *The White Possessive* formulates the concept of the rationalizing “possessive logics” (xi) of the white body politic (the white nation-state) of Australia that creates a superior race dominating over the Aborigines in Australia. For Moreton-Robinson “the regulatory mechanisms of these nation-states are extremely busy reaffirming and reproducing this possessiveness through a process of perpetual Indigenous dispossession, ranging from the refusal of Indigenous sovereignty to

overregulated piecemeal concessions” (xi). It is these possessive mechanisms of the “White Australia” (a cornerstone in the formation of the Australian nation-state)—functioning within the contours of a colonial British legacy and promoting discriminatory policies toward the Aborigines—that in my paper I will try to substantiate through the exclusionary, modernist nation building theories of Ernest Gellner on a selective basis. The mechanism of making a white Australian nation, during colonial era, demanded a Gellnerian cultural homogeneity and sharing and consolidating of basic ethnic values among the whites that ever wished to dispense with “low folk culture” of the Aborigines. Such whiteness of the settlers were further instrumental in sponsoring an education system and validating a state machinery (methods thought by Gellner to be imperative in the formation of a nation) that had protective and coercing authority over the Aborigines. If cultural homogeneity required a single unstratified community then in tandem it demanded an absorption and assimilation of the low cultured Aborigines within its precincts. This “possessiveness,” to echo Moreton-Robinson, of the Whites regarding the Aborigines took a new turn in its policies of assimilation and protection. The discursive, material and ideological creation of this unified White nation was, thereby, at the cost of the Indigenous sovereignty and ontology. Further, the relevance of a Gellnerian study of the White Australian nation building project and the race relationship, during the colonial time, is to be found in the fact that Ernest Gellner’s theoretical conceptualization of a modern nation formation had not been consciously applied in any major Whiteness studies pertaining to Australia. Whether it be Russell McGregor’s *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*; David Hollinsworth’s *Race and Racism in Australia*; Roslyn Russell and Philip Chubb’s *One Destiny! The Federation Story, How Australia became a Nation*; John Docker and Gerhard Fischer’s *Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand*; Peta Stephenson’s *Beyond Black and White: Aborigines, Asian-Australians and the National Imaginary*; Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s *Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*; Michelle Carey’s *Whitefellas and Wadjulas: Anti-colonial Constructions of the Non-Aboriginal Self*; Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Maryrose Casey and Fiona Nicoll’s *Transnational Whiteness Matters*; Jane Carey and Claire McLisky’s *Creating White Australia*; or S.A. Magnet’s *When Biometrics Fail: Gender, Race, and the Technology of Identity*, the application of Gellner’s theory of nationalism is conspicuous by its absence.

With the inception of the “Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association” (ACRAWSA) the Whiteness study gained currency in Australia. The forum (as also reflected in its journal—*Critical Race and Whiteness Studies*) promotes an interdisciplinary critical discourse about race and whiteness on disciplines as varied as sociology, anthropology, culture studies, politics, and literature. The forum is an opportunity for both Indigenous and non-indigenous academicians and activists to develop critical thoughts in the field of Whiteness studies. By its own admission the forum is meant to:

- Respect the existence of and continuing rights deriving from Indigenous sovereignties in Australia and elsewhere
- Critically investigate and challenge racial privilege and the construction and maintenance of race and whiteness, both past and present. (ACRAWSA)

The association highlights how race far from being a pre-given is an ever evolving factor and how racial categorization came to existence and operates in the contemporary society especially in discriminating and marginalizing one group at the cost of privileging the other. Further for the critical association:

“Whiteness” is mentioned specifically in order to challenge the common perception that “race” is only a problem for people who do not qualify as white. This perception is common because whiteness often goes unmarked, being presented as the “norm” against which other categories are defined as different. This often produces assimilatory policies in which not being white is seen as a “problem” that needs to be fixed by encouraging non-white people to become more like white people. (ACRAWSA)

So, the association in a way promotes Indigenous sovereignty, ontology and worldview by critiquing Whiteness in Australia. Yet, the question arises as to why in none of the critical writings of the members of the association, or for that matter the contributors to its journal, have there been any application of the nationalism theories of Ernest Gellner in the historical formation of Whiteness in Australia. The answer perhaps lies in the fact that Ernest Gellner, a modern thinker of the theory of nationalism had always kept the formation of nation and that of race at bay. Race and nationalism are distinct for Gellner and are hence disassociated from each other. But, a more discerning reading of Gellner would help us build an important though subtle link between race and nation. In “Social Entropy and Equality in Industrial Society,” Gellner is of the belief that “entropy-resistant” population who refuse to become “evenly dispersed throughout the entire society” (Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* 64) always exists. This assertion—followed by various examples from life—leads Gellner to the hypothesis that a community called “blue people” (“by an accident of heredity pigmentally blue”) always exist who are “inassimilable within national culture” (Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* 65). In an upwardly mobile industrial homogenous culture—the basis for the Gellnerian nation—such “blue people” are aberrations who require, albeit deny, assimilation. What Gellner bypasses through this hypothesis is the existence of a nation within nation and, even more, a racial superiority that propels the “higher” race/culture to assimilate the “lower” race/culture within its precinct in the process of the formation of a nation. The Whiteness study theorists have hitherto overlooked this particular aspect of the Gellnerian thought or rather the undercurrent of his modernist thought while dealing with the formation of a White nation in Australia. In my paper I would therefore like to substantiate the process of formation of a White Australian nation (through select examples, especially during the early stages of White nation formation by the settlers in Australia) through the theories of Ernest Gellner (a brief synopsis of his thesis of nation formation is provided in the beginning of the section to follow) that talks about the attempt to subsume the “blue people” in the monolithic, modern, uppish, nationalist discourse. In the process my paper would also reveal how the Indigenous Australians were positioned within the White Gellnerian nationalism that emerged from the invasion and “settlement of Australia.”

Ernest Gellner and Building of White Australia

Gellner stands against the Western Marxist view (as was represented in the writings of Tom Nairn) that nationalism is an outcome of modern capitalist society. Gellner, a self-declared “lifelong anti-Communist and anti-Marxist” (“Return of a Native” 4), in his *Nations and Nationalism* redefines nationalism from a different standpoint: “Contrary to what Marxism has lead people to expect, it is pre-industrial society which is addicted to horizontal differentiation within societies, whereas industrial society strengthens the boundaries between nations rather those between classes” (Gellner 12).

Societal specialization has been the prime concern of Gellner’s theorization on nation. Rather than delving the ethnic roots, Gellner’s prototype suggests three stages of human history: the first is a pre-agrarian society (a society of hunters and gatherers who were too undersized to

allow the kind of political divisions; the second is agrarian society (a society where only a minor population specialized on military, economic, political or religious activities); the last stage is industrial society (a society where the state takes up the role of being the protector of the commune and there are other distinctive factors such as mobility, universal literacy and individualism). Gellner's attempt to methodically counter the existing views of nationalism is for the first time evident in his *Thought and Change*. According to him, nationalism makes a transition from agricultural/religious to industrial/scientific society. Nationalism is a response to modern society's need for labour force with its basis in common language and fundamental education. Mass education's primary purpose in moulding the new "modular man," that is, an individual who must be easily interchangeable, is closely concomitant to the industrial need for a semi-skilled labour force. By losing their traditional roles in pre-industrial societies, men (and later even women) become available in the labour market as uniform and homogenized mass, rather than as individuated identities. This standardization of expression and understanding leads to the capacity for context-free communication. With industrialism, people moved from a vertical status-centred social structure (as in agrarian society) to a horizontal culture-centred social system, presided over by egalitarian expectation and aspiration. Like Max Weber, Gellner also focuses on the bureaucratization of culture: "... the level of literacy and technical competence, in a standardized medium, a common conceptual currency, which is required for the members of this society, if they are to be properly employable and enjoy full and effective moral citizenship, is so high that simply cannot be provided by the kin or local units, such as they are" (*Nations and Nationalism* 34). For Gellner, such conditions may only be fulfilled by "a modern 'national' educational system, a pyramid at whose base there are primary schools, staffed by teachers, led by the product of advanced graduate schools" (Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* 34).

Countering "ideological diffusionism" (Leoussi 102), Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* hurls a deadly challenge to Western Marxism by using its own tool (mostly, the labour market). Thus, "to the widespread Marxist clichés about structure and super-structure, Gellner responded with his own brand of labour-related and culture-tied determinism" (Leoussi 102). Indeed, influenced by Emile Durkheim, Gellner's nationalism is a "historical mission" to "dispense new forms of loyalty" and "identification" with the nation-state (Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* 102). "Hence, nationalism is a political response to a functional imperative: territorial and social mobility makes it necessary the construction of a collective identity that can operate for the uprooted individual as an anchor and steering compass" (Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* 103). Equally ascribing to the terms of Max Weber, Gellner says: "The state has not merely the monopoly of legitimate violence, but also of the accreditation of educational qualification. So the marriage of state and culture takes place, and we find ourselves in the Age of Nationalism" (*Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals* 107). Gellner might appear hyperbolic in stating the fact that "nationalism ... invents nations where they do not exist" (*Nations and Nationalism* 55), yet power of this appeal is nonetheless ingenious. Gellner may be summarized with his following words:

... when general social conditions make for standardised, homogeneous, centrally sustained high cultures, pervading entire populations and not just elite minorities, a situation arises in which well-defined educationally sanctioned and unified cultures constitute very nearly the only kind of unit with which men willingly identify. The cultures now seem to be the natural repositories of political legitimacy. Only then does it come to appear that any defiance of their boundaries by political units constitutes a scandal. (*Nations and Nationalism* 55)

Nationalism for Gellner is an outcome of affiliation to a Puritanistic "High" culture of the

secular intelligentsia and a dispensing with Pluralistic “Low” culture of unurbanized localities and folk communities. Nationalism consequently leads inevitably to the oblivion of folk traditions and generates a social cohesion at the behest of modernity. No wonder, what was considered as of yet the “only theory in the field” of nationalism was none the less criticized as “immoderately materialist” (Anderson 205) and “deterministic” (Smith 65).

If for Gellner high-cultural homogenization, obliviousness of low-folk culture, uniformity and mobility engendering state sponsored education system and a state machinery that has coercive and protecting authority were the basic pre-requisite for the formation of a modern nation, then the same were to be traced in the discourse of White modernist nationalism of Australia that aspired to turn the colonial settlement to a nation. The White had ever perceived their culture to be superior and “high” to that of the Aborigines; and the civilizing missionary zeal and Aboriginal protection system were the two integral elements to the assimilationist tendency of the White colonial Australia. With the discovery of the “New World” called Australia the modern colonizers with their exploitative capitalist values on the one hand and Christian missionary zeal on the other (a connection studied by various critics such as Adas and Drayton) had ever relegated the Aborigines to the position of a Gellnerian “pre-agrarian society” of primitive, savage class that required development, progress, protection and were thereby meant to be assimilated within the “high” culture of the Whites. This helped them in the “monopoly of legitimate violence” (Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals* 107) on the one hand and creation of an educated and “cultured” labour force for their new nation on the other. If on the one hand the Aborigines were taught “high” English values and language for cultural elevation, then they also faced devastation, pillage, rape, mass genocide as part of modern State’s repressive measures. Such an attempt was akin to the “extinction” of humanity through its attempt to create a dystopia of Anglo-centric supremacy. About the use of English that led to cultural devastation, we could well agree with Enrique Dussel: “A humanity that only spoke in English and that could only refer to ‘its’ past as an Occidental past would testify to the extinction of the majority of historical human cultural creativity. It would be the greatest castration imaginable and irreversible in humanity’s world history!” (237). The Aborigines were ideologically conditioned primarily through language and even through Eurocentric manners and lifestyle. In this conditioning a “modern society is ... like a modern army, only more so. It provides a prolonged and fairly thorough training for all its recruits, insisting on certain shared qualifications: literacy, numeracy, basic work habits and social skills” (Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* 27-28). Any entity who had completed this basic generic training becomes an apt potential recruit for a job in an industrially oriented nation (Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* 27-28). For Gellner, this system of modern exo-education promises “employability, dignity, security and self-respect of individuals”: “A man’s education is by far his most precious investment, and in effect confers identity on him. Modern man is not loyal to a monarch or a land or a faith, whatever he may say, but to a culture” (*Nations and Nationalism* 36). Similarly, the Aborigines were removed from their land, devoid of their spiritual faith and their overall “low” culture, and put under the missionaries’ protective care which focused on the Aborigine’s basic improvement and fundamental education that could create a group of handy domestic labor. James T. Carroll in “The Smell of the White Man is Killing us: Education and Assimilation among Indigenous People” brings to fore the functioning of the missions in Western Australia who prepared a curriculum in their schools in tune with the requirements of the local economy:

The records of indigenous missions at the turn of the century are full of statements on the vocational nature of the school curriculum. In indigenous schools the division of labor is always gendered; the boys “are taught

carpentry, gardening, and farming in all its branches,” (*Annual Report of the Chief Protector of the Aborigines*) while the girls receive instruction “in all the domestic duties, such as needlework, cooking, dressmaking, etc., and the general care of the home.” (Carroll 25)

Even Russell McGregor reminds us of a similar modicum of teaching in such missionary schools: “The teaching should be of a very simple character; it should include reading, writing, and elements of arithmetic Moral training should be given in the schools on the simplest and broadest lines possible; but the primary object must be to train the natives in industrial habits” (85). An 1835 statement by Governor Gawler in Adelaide (South Australia) expresses no different intent: “Black men, we wish to make you happy but you cannot be happy unless you imitate white men. Build huts, wear clothes and be useful You cannot be happy unless you love God ... love white men ... learn to speak English ...” (qtd. in Broome 27).

With assimilation came protection. But behind the facade of protection the protectors and boards were given complete power and control over the lives of the Aboriginal people. Reserves at times were no less than a prison. Children were forcefully separated from their family and lived in dormitories. Those thought to be acting badly were placed in “The Boob,” a prison within a prison. Escape was a matter of impossibility. *The Little Red Yellow Black Book*, an introductory reader in Indigenous Australia by Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Studies, points out how even the private life of the Aborigines were controlled by the protectors: “Depending on the place and the people in charge, the treatment was in some cases physically cruel and authoritarian. Those in charge were often contemptuous of us. For example in some cases women had to apply in writing to the mission superintendent if they needed underwear” (Bruce Pascoe and AIATSIS 97-98). It is this coercive power that Gellner believes is indispensable in the formation of a nation. Yet, this inhuman bullying is not merely a basis of nation formation but even an offshoot of racism. No wonder, as Hollinsworth reminds, the agents of nation making in Australia “towards the end of the nineteenth century,” gradually became successful in making racism and nationalism “become almost synonymous...” (99). Now, if the thesis of Gellner’s modern nation making is thereby substantiated through a range of various examples to be found in the assimilation White Australian settlement phase, then the same Gellnerian thesis could also be linked to the issues of race and whiteness. Assimilationist policy of a White nation building in some form or other remained a pervasive agenda with Australian government throughout. Yet, this stratifying strategy is the most subtle form of institutionalized racism. If a neo-Marxist like Gellner had limitations with his theory of nation and nationalism, this was precisely due to his approach towards a classless homogenous society and thereby being ever “colour blind” to ideologies of race. But, racism has always been a part of the Australian national discourse despite its myth of being an egalitarian society.

Bringing together culture and state in the modern industrial era, Gellner comments: “Just as every girl should have a husband, preferably her own, so every culture must have its state, preferably its own” (“The Coming of Nationalism and its Interpretation: The Myths of Nation and Class” 110). In the same way, the Australian White national assimilationist culture is therefore linked to the state and becomes a state promoted institutionalized agenda. Protection laws also came into force and even later integrationist and White multicultural policies followed. Former SNAICC (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care) Chairperson, Brian Butler, sees racism as “a powerful and pervasive factor that our children confront every day of their lives. Because Europeans are largely oblivious of it and

its effects, they are unable to deal with it or to prepare Aboriginal children for it” (9-10). Nigel D’Souza analyses the concept of “institutional racism” in the following way:

Institutional racism can be described as the historically determined and developed barriers that exist in the nature of the arms of the state— the judiciary and legal system, the bureaucracy, the coercive arms of the state, the police, secret services, governments, and economically, in the disadvantaged position of aborigines [sic]—to the participation of aborigines [sic] in Australian society and the sharing of the wealth generated by the economy. (10-11)

Further, according to D’Souza Institutional racism also acts against the “rights and ability” of “Aboriginal reproduction.” One may sincerely and assertively agree with D’Souza “that institutional racism facilitates the domination and exploitation of Aborigines in Australia” (10-11). It is this “institutionalized racism” that formed the basis of White Australian nation in its burgeoning moments. The “institutionalized racism” was made to act in form of a nationalism that helped to find a nation where none existed before. This creation of a nation through nationalism is founding principle of a Gellnerian thesis. To define *à la* Gellner, White Australian nation was formed through a nationalism which is an “imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases of the totality, of the population” (*Nations and Nationalism* 57). This “high culture” dominance over the “low cultures” was institutionalized through “the general diffusion of a school-mediated, academy-supervised idiom, codified for the requirements of a reasonably precise bureaucratic and technological communication” (Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* 57). This was required for the establishment of an “anonymous, impersonal society” where “mutually substitutable atomized individuals” would be “held together” “by a shared culture” (Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* 57). Hence, the Gellnerian nation formation in the garb of a simplistic homogenization ruled out the individuality, idiosyncrasies, and subjectivities of the more “complexly structured” minority groups. Accordingly, in the White Australia, the Aboriginal children were fostered in White homes that were presumed to have a higher and better culture with the microcosmic agenda of creating a macrocosmic nation. Such modern loyalty-invoking White Australian culture, which went beyond restricted local or tribal/folk affiliations and their idiosyncratically produced cultures, definitely revealed an obviously objective, pragmatic and ulterior purpose. We may here also refer even to the theories of Nairn who spoke, much like Gellner, about modern nation being a matter of “political baptism of lower classes” (41)—here read classes as races.

Going back to the Gellnerian thesis of primitive “pre-agrarian” society, at the cost of whose development a nation is built by the State, one could well talk about two major offshoots of such a thesis. From the very beginning, due to superiority complex and concepts of warfare, violence and frontier, the White colonizers dismissed the Aborigines as savages, vermin, sub-human, cannibal and a “doomed race.” Secondly, as they were not the “agrarian” society and far away from being masses of “industrialized” society, they were deterritorialized (Australia declared by colonizers as *terra nullius*) and their lands usurped. They were vainly sympathized as “the poorest objects on the habitable globe” (qtd. in Dodson 25); or callously dismissed as “blood thirsty, cunning, ferocious, and marked by black ingratitude and base treachery...” (qtd. in Dodson 25). Murder and genocide of the Aborigines were often justified on the basis of such assumptions. From the very early nineteenth century at various parts of the subcontinent Aboriginal people were treated brutally and considered less than human which led to an organized and institutionalized murder and elimination of these people. Bruce Elder in his *Blood on the Wattle* recounts such massacres and maltreatments. One such event

re-narrated by Elder is about the brutality programmed and executed by Macquarie on the Aborigines on the Sydney river basin in March-April 1816:

A military expedition was sent to the Grose, Nepean and Hawkesbury river areas. Their instructions were to capture every Aboriginal persons they came in contact with and to shoot all resistors and hang their bodies in trees. The aim, as Macquarie recorded it, was to “eventually strike Terror amongst the Surviving Tribes”.

... Macquaire seemed nonplussed by the massacre. The deaths of women and children were dismissed as an “unavoidable result.” (16)

It was not merely mass genocide that the Aborigines faced during the formation of a White nation but also the Aboriginal women faced sexual atrocities. The “primitive” women were dismissed as objects to be sexually assaulted. Aboriginal women were popularly cast as wanton or licentious, thus legitimating their widespread rape and sexual assault. In 1884, squatter and parliamentarian, Sir A. H. Palmer maintained that it was impossible to “ravish” an Aboriginal woman, for “anyone who knew anything about the blacks knew that the[y] ... had no idea of chastity—that a fig of tobacco would purchase any woman” (qtd. in Evans, “‘Soiled Doves’: Prostitution and Society in Colonial Queensland—An Overview” 13). White rapists also “conveniently believed that native women were merely subject to capture and brutal oppression by their own menfolk” (Evans, “Harlots and Helots—Exploitation of the Aboriginal Remnant” 106). The “stealing of gins,” followed by their “forcible detention” became a “matter of frequent occurrence and a recognised custom” (Evans, “Harlots and Helots—Exploitation of the Aboriginal Remnant” 105). “Gin busting” and “gin sprees” were also justified as it was believed that Aboriginal women were the legitimate spoils of colonization (Goodall and Huggins 415): “... the men frequently saw the necessity to conquer the women as an integral part of their colonial adventure” (Huggins 17). Sexual relations with Aboriginal women were also often viewed as a side benefit of working on remote cattle stations. Ann McGrath, for example, relates a story of how a station manager induced White men to enter his employ by offering them the pick of the best “black velvet” (McGrath 16). Since sexual service was another “built-in component of their labour services” (Evans, “Harlots and Helots—Exploitation of the Aboriginal Remnant” 55), the position of Aboriginal women could be construed as being even more difficult than that of their menfolk. This pattern of sexual exploitation continued well into the twentieth century when young “half-caste” Aboriginal girls were sent as domestic labour to white homesteads.¹

The killing of the Aborigines, exploitative methods (both sexual and otherwise) and the expansive and inclusive measures of the colonial frontier by forceful occupation of the land continued. This colonial mindset that declared the land free to be taken is aptly described by S. Brennan in his paper “Native Title and Treaty Debate: What’s the Connection?”: “*Terra nullius* was not so much official British policy in Australia as a mindset. ... That mindset and the legal fiction of an empty continent was the bedrock upon which the Australian colonies and later a federated nation was built” (Brennan 2). From the European colonial perspective, human agency was defined by the use of natural resources for human purposes, and the cultivation of land gave rise to the idea of ownership (Fitzmaurice 117-121). Title to land was connected to use and usage of land, because the role of land law was to protect and foster economic interests (Graham 98, 118). As corollaries of this forceful acquisition of land and dispossession were depriving the Aborigines of their traditional food, family, culture, values, health, wellbeing and liberty. Henry Reynolds in *The Other Side of the Frontier* quotes William Ridley, a missionary talking about the fate of a group of Balonne River Blacks in the 1840s. Their situation was typical of what happened all over the country. Balonne reminds that the Aborigines were never “at a loss for the necessities of life” before the colonial

settlement. The flora and fauna was abundant and so was drinkable water. Moreover, with the introduction of the cattle by the colonizers kangaroos were driven off. However, “After some fatal conflicts, in which some colonists and many aborigines [sic] have been slain, the blacks [sic] have been awed to submission to the orders which forbid their access to the river” (Reynolds 54). With no access to the rivers but a few waterholes “within a day’s walk of which it was impossible to get sufficient food ... that owing to these combined hardships many died” (Reynolds 54-55).

It is thus evident that Aboriginality, with its “non-modernity” and “primitivism” as assessed by European standards was a colonial construct endorsed to facilitate the project of settler-nation building. This colonial nation building of Australia with its modernist, expansive and assimilationist tendencies is an apt exemplification of the thesis of nationalism propounded by Ernest Gellner. However, as I have also shown, this colonial nation building intersects with the dimensions of race distinction and the ideologies of Whiteness—concepts otherwise overlooked in Gellner. Hence, in this Gellnerian study of Australian nation building of the settler colonizers I have moved beyond Gellner to show how the narratives of race and nation strategically harmonize during foundation phase of White settler Australian nationalism.

Notes

¹ I am hugely indebted to Peta Stephenson’s Ph.D. Thesis (43-4) in drafting this section about violence on Aboriginal women.

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