

## 6. The legacy of Ben Boyd's Kanakas

*Ben Boyd's Kanakas* covers three notable episodes in Australian history: Boyd's role in the commercial, political and social life of New South Wales in the 1840s; the contribution of Boyd's Kanakas to ideas on race in Australia leading to the White Australia policy in 1901; and as a 'prologue' to the Queensland Kanaka trade from 1863 to 1904.

Ben Boyd was a tall, imposing man with an expansive and a well-articulated imagination who spent his days and nights devising plans for business or pleasure. He never married or showed any interest in women. Samuel Sidney, a London journalist, published *The Three Colonies of Australia* (1852) based on Boyd's younger brother Mark's experiences in New South Wales in the 1840s. Sidney explained Boyd's popularity during his early years in the colony: 'A yacht of the Royal Squadron, an apparently unlimited capital, and imposing personal appearance, fluent oratory, aristocratic connections, and a fair share of commercial astuteness acquired at the Stock Exchange, placed him at the head of the squattocracy'.<sup>1</sup> Struggling colonists welcomed the money Boyd put into the depressed economy of New South Wales from 1842 to 1845. Boyd was a leading figure in founding the Pastoral Association. He contributed to funding the *Atlas* to challenge the governor's new squatting regulations in 1844. Boyd also used his connections in London to lobby members of Parliament and the Colonial Office.

Boyd's popularity began declining after he resigned from the Legislative Council early in 1845. He was said to be lacking in application, attention to detail and patience in bringing his grandiose schemes to fruition. He was said to be driven by megalomania and delusions of

<sup>1</sup> Sidney, *The Three Colonies of Australia*, 130.

persecutions. When successful, he was unctuous, patronising unscrupulous; when he failed he became acrimonious, spiteful and self-deceiving. As one settler observed: 'Mr Boyd is one of those speculators in stock that who will burn his fingers and then blame the fire for being hot'.<sup>2</sup> Boyd's support for the renewing of convict transportation in 1846 alienated the 'liberal' commercial and professional middle class. Even squatters desperate for 'cheap' coolie labour from India or China refused to support Boyd's importation of barbarous cannibals from Melanesia. Sir Charles Nicholson, speaker in the Legislative Council, wrote to a friend in 1849 pointing to 'the hectoring pretensions of the man', and welcomed his committal to gaol for a few days for failing to pay the wages of his employees.<sup>3</sup>

Boyd left Sydney in 1849 on the *Wanderer* for the Californian goldfields but had no luck. On the return voyage to New South Wales in 1851 he went ashore on Guadalcanal and was killed and eaten by natives. A few weeks later the *Wanderer* was wrecked on the bar at the entrance to Port Macquarie. Sir Charles Nicholson in a second letter early in 1851 concluded: 'The whole concern of the Royal Bank has proved a most gigantic failure, if not fraud'.<sup>4</sup> The *Freeman's Journal* characterised Boyd as the 'Prince of Squatters' who had been 'an extensive importer of Cannibals from the very where he himself fell victim of their savage ferocity!'. Boyd's 'kidnapping' of South Sea cannibals was not considered to be violating any human law but should be judged according to the higher law of Nature and God.<sup>5</sup> Others portrayed Boyd as a 'notorious' and 'dodgy entrepreneur' who fraudulently took money from the Royal Bank raised by sale of debentures in Britain to make himself rich. T. A. Murray in 1857

<sup>2</sup> Hamilton, *SMH*, 22 May 1844.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholson to Cunninghame, 4 March 1849, Cunninghame family papers, 1833-1858.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholson to Cunninghame, 12 February 1851. Cunninghame family papers, 1833-1858.

<sup>5</sup> *Freeman's Journal*. 4 December 1851.

accused Boyd of using his connections in London to obtain favourable and unprecedented conditions for his pastoral leases.<sup>6</sup> The main victims of Boyd's failed speculations in New South Wales were the British shareholders, not protected by the law of limited liability, were left destitute when the Royal Bank of Australia was wound up in a London court in 1855.<sup>7</sup>

Boyd acquired a 'legendary' aura after an island trader arrived at Sydney in 1854 to spread a rumour that he was still alive on Guadalcanal. Several ship owners wrote to the colonial secretary proposing expeditions to establish whether Boyd was still alive. When HMS *Herald* went to Guadalcanal late in 1854 the natives told the captain that Boyd had been speared and then cut down with an axe. The natives persuaded him to buy Boyd's skull for 20 axes. The skull was later identified as that of a Papuan native.

Alan Lennox-Boyd, a former Secretary of State for the Colonies, went to the Solomon Islands in 1960 to investigate rumours that his great uncle Ben Boyd had not been killed and eaten on Guadalcanal in 1851. Lennox-Boyd had a collection of Boyd memorabilia in his Belgrave Square town house, including a scale model of the *Wanderer*, copies of *The Last Voyage of the Wanderer*, paintings by Oswald Brierley who came to New South Wales with Boyd, and an old *Daily Mail* article claiming that sailors on a British frigate had seen Ben with a group of natives on Guadalcanal 20 years after his supposed death. The *Sydney Morning Herald* ran an article on Lennox-Boyd's visit to the Pacific Islands to establish his great nephew's fate. An editorial, 'Alan among the Anthropophagi', and letters to the editor explored the range of opinions on Boyd's life and death.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, *Murray of Yarralumla*, 254.

<sup>7</sup> Turner, 'A notorious Australian banker', 57

<sup>8</sup> *SMH*, 8, 9, 11, 27, 30 January, 2 February 1960. *Pacific Islands Monthly*, XXX, 22, 63.

British emigrants brought their ‘race, language, institutions and religion’ to the Australia colonies.<sup>9</sup> Colonial ideas on race were based on the Bible, English law and institutions; Enlightenment philosophy and natural science; and the journals of explorers, missionaries, traders and naval officers. Genesis proclaimed that God had created man in his own image. St Paul declared that God ‘hath made of one blood all the nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth’.<sup>10</sup> Enlightenment scientists followed ‘the strict rule of scientific scrutiny’ to prove that all humans belonged to one species. British ethnologists argued that claims of white superiority over other races were not based on innate differences of brain capacity or skin colour.<sup>11</sup> While all races and nations were capable of physical, moral and intellectual improvement, some progressed from barbarism to maturity by minute steps, whereas other nations remained stationery or declined. In the course of seven centuries’, Macaulay wrote, ‘the wretched and degraded [English] race have become the greatest and most civilized people the world ever saw’.<sup>12</sup>

By the 1830s Australian colonists were ranking the races of Europe, Asia and the Pacific on a ‘scale of humanity’.<sup>13</sup> The English were ‘higher, superior in elegance and taste’ to the Scots but not as ‘intellectual’ or ‘rationally religious and moral’.<sup>14</sup> In descending order were the Welsh and the Irish who, as Christians and British subjects, met the higher criteria of

<sup>9</sup> Ohlsson, ‘The origins of a white Australia’, 207. Ohlsson, ‘Myra Willard and the ghost of a white Australia’, 36-7. Ohlsson, ‘James Stephen’s doctrine of a white Australia’, 148.

<sup>10</sup> Genesis, 1: 26, 27; 9:25. Galatians 3: 28, 29. James 2: 17-18, 20.

<sup>11</sup> Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Man*, ix-xxxix, 2-10, 16. Prichard, *The Natural History of Man*, I, xi, xxi-xxiii, 1-7.

<sup>12</sup> Macaulay, *Literary and Historical Essays*, pt. 2, 293.

<sup>13</sup> Cannadine, ‘Race’, *The Undivided Past*, 176-184.

<sup>14</sup> *SM*, 16 March 1833, 25 February 1835.

race, religion and nationality. Dr Lang described Irish Catholics emigrants as servile, superstitious and morally debased. They came from the strongholds of ‘popery, bigotry, superstition, and immorality’ in the south and west of Ireland to threaten the morals and the political liberties of Protestant colonists. An English traveler suggested that the worst features of the Irish were so deeply imprinted on New South Wales that only ‘a considerable influx of English blood’ would ‘improve the Australian character’. If the colonial Irish were more barbarous, vicious and heathenish, the *Sydney Monitor* pointed out, they ‘would make worse Colonists than the heathen Chinese and Indian Coolies’.<sup>15</sup>

Further down the scale of humanity were the free people of colour from the United States, more enlightened in religion being bible-reading men and women though not more than moral or simple than the Irish.<sup>16</sup> Indian Eurasians, a mixture of Indian and European blood, were ‘a useless and idle race’ whose ‘physical weakness and habits of effeminacy’ made them ‘unsuited to the wants of the Colony’.<sup>17</sup> The Chinese, on the next rung down the ladder, were a clever, educated and civilised people but were unable able to match the progress of the British in their religion, laws, institutions, language, and commerce. The Chinese were slaves to superstition and custom, bowed down by despotism, lacking in probity, fatalistic, and addicted to a ‘nameless vice’.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *SH*, 19 June 1837, 19 June 1837, 1 August 1838, 15 July 1839, 14, 18 September 1840, 14 April 1841. *Monitor*, 30 June, 25, 29 August 1837. *Sydney Times*, 1 July 1837. *AC*, 8, 10 September 1840. Lang, *The Question of Questions*, 3-16. Hood, *Australia and the East*, 273-4.

<sup>16</sup> *Monitor*, 16 March 1833, 25 February 1835, 30 June 1837

<sup>17</sup> Ohlsson, “‘Better than nothing’”, 154, 160-1, 167-8.

<sup>18</sup> *SM*, 19, 30 June 1837. *Atlas*, 27 March 1847. *Argus*, 26 December 1848. *Moreton Bay Courier*, 20 September, 22 November 1851. *SMH*, 22, 24 April 1852, 27 January 1854. *Empire*, 6, 26 February, 11 March. 23 April 1852. Lamb, NSW LC, *Empire*, 8 July 1854.

Indians were seen as a semi-barbarous race, physically and morally inferior to Europeans and degraded by their religion. Indians were British subjects but not Christians or Europeans. The 169 Indian servants and coolies brought to New South Wales from 1837 to 1846 were described as patient and tractable but of 'inferior blood' and 'deteriorated intellect', low in the moral scale of human nature', and predestined to occupy a station of permanent inferiority. Ten feeble and superstitious Indians were said to equal three English or Scotch shepherds.<sup>19</sup>

Dumont d'Urville, a French naval officer, wrote a scholarly article in 1831 dividing ~~the Pacific-Ocean into three regions~~. He retained the name ~~Polynesia~~ for the islands in the ~~eastern Pacific south of the equator and Hawaii in the north~~. ~~Polynesians~~ were of Asiatic origin ~~descended from Shem, copper coloured, spoke similar languages, and~~ practiced *tapu* (ritual prohibition). The natives of Micronesia on coral atolls straddling the equator were ~~similar to Polynesians in skin colour, culture and language~~. Melanesia encompassed ~~New Guinea, New Britain, New Ireland, New Caledonia, the Santa Cruz Islands, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, the New Hebrides and Loyalty Islands~~. ~~Melanesians~~ came ~~descended from Ham~~, and cursed by Noah to remain 'a servant of servants', migrated from Ethiopia.<sup>20</sup>

Australian colonists perceived the natives of the Pacific and Asia through the prisms of nineteenth century European morality, religion and property, and judged them in aesthetic or moral terms.<sup>21</sup> Missionary ~~sermons, letters and books~~ described Pacific Islanders ~~as enveloped in a moral gloom,~~ living with ~~promiscuity, human sacrifice,~~ infanticide,

<sup>19</sup> *Monitor*, 14, 30 June, 20 September 1837, 9 April, 5 November 1838, 29 April 1839. *Australian*, 21 August, 1, 3, 6 November, 25 December, 1 January, 12 February. 7 March 1839.

<sup>20</sup> [Duyker, Dumont d'Urville, 112, 302-3 \(map\), 304-7, 630.](#)

<sup>21</sup> Denning, 'Ethnohistory in Polynesia', 36-8.

~~cannibalism mutilation and desolating wars~~. They committed ~~‘dark and dreadful crimes’~~, indulging in ~~‘odious and brutal vices’ and ‘revolting forms’ of ‘human depravity’~~.<sup>22</sup>

William Ellis, a missionary on Tahiti, mastered the native language and compiled voluminous notes on every aspect of Tahitian society and culture. Polynesian ~~‘mental powers’~~ were ~~not inferior to~~ the ‘generality of mankind’, he concluded. Their curious and inquisitive children had no difficulty learning to read and write, or to grasp the rules of mathematics. Ellis acknowledged that the Polynesian countenance was prepossessing but ‘no portion of the human race was ever perhaps sunk lower in brutal licentiousness and moral degradation’. Their depraved moral habits weakened their mental energies, and enervated their physical powers.<sup>23</sup> Samuel Marsden described the Maoris of New Zealand as a savage race of cannibals ‘full of superstition, and wholly under the power and influence of the Prince of Darkness’. Even so, they were becoming ‘a very superior People in point of mental Endowments’ under missionary guidance.<sup>24</sup>

Explorers described Melanesians as a diminutive race with dark skins, ~~long heads~~, flat noses, frizzy hair, and thin and poorly-formed limbs, flat countenances and monkey features. They were a miserable race, indolent and stupid, ~~distinguished from wild beasts only by their ingenious methods of destruction~~, and with no concept of religion ~~other than~~ the ~~malignant spirits~~ tormenting ~~them~~.<sup>25</sup> A British naval officer reported in 1840 that the natives of Tana

<sup>22</sup> ~~Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprises in the South Pacific Islands*, 513-5, 560-9, 581-2. Yate’s evidence, 12 February 1836, q 1596, SC Aborigines (British Settlements).~~

<sup>23</sup> Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, 85, 92, 96-8

<sup>24</sup> Marsden to Hardcastle, 25 October 1810, Marsden papers, II, A1993, ML. Elder, *The Letters and Journals of Samuel Marsden*, 60-2. Marsden to LMS, 30 January 1801; Marsden to Coates, 21 November 1824, Yarwood, *Samuel Marsden*, 115-6, 172-3, 177.

<sup>25</sup> ~~Duyker, *Dumont d’Urville*, 257. Williams’ evidence, 29 July 1836, q 5708, SC Aborigines (British settlements). Erskine, *Journal of a Cruise*, 16-17, 369. Murray, *Missions in Western Polynesia*, 137, 175. Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, 82-3. Russell, *Polynesia*, 279-90.~~

were 'little inclined to traffic, filthy, ill-looking, insolent and troublesome as a people'.<sup>26</sup>

Andrew Cheyne characterised the Melanesians as 'extremely cruel, void of affection and truly wretches in every sense of the word. They were 'a wild and ferocious set, exceedingly treacherous, and great thieves', degraded beyond the power of conception'. The distinction between right and wrong was unknown to them: 'Murder, cannibalism, theft, covertness, lying, and knavery of every description, are not looked upon by them as sins'. Males and females were exceedingly filthy in their persons. Their abominable habit of smearing their faces and hair, with a pigment, mixed with coconut oil, adds much to their savage appearance.<sup>27</sup>

From the earliest years of Botany Bay missionaries and travelers compared and contrasted the Australian Aborigines with the natives of the Pacific Islanders on a scale of humanity. The captain of a ship bringing missionaries to Tahiti by way of Sydney and New Zealand in 1802 noted that the New Zealanders, despite their 'rude behaviours, furious temper, and horrid customs', were far superior race to the wretched, miserable and cruel New Hollanders.<sup>28</sup> An unsigned memorial in 1809 described the New Zealanders as a very different race to the Aborigines in New South Wales.<sup>29</sup> Missionaries noted that Maoris were 'magnificent barbarians, both in person and intellect, compared to the abject natives of New Holland'.<sup>30</sup> John Williams reported that the intellect of Polynesians was equal to that of

<sup>26</sup> Shineberg, *They Came for Sandalwood*, 120-1.

<sup>27</sup> Cheyne, *A Description of the Islands of the Western Pacific Ocean*, 34. ~~Shineberg, *The Trading Voyages of Andrew Cheyne*, 129.~~

<sup>28</sup> Wilson to directors LMS, 15 March 1802, Davies, *History of the Tahitian Mission*, 31.

<sup>29</sup> Memorandum concerning New South Wales, 30 December 1809, *HRNZ*, I, 293.

<sup>30</sup> Montgomery, *Journal of Voyages and Travels*, vol. 2, 174.



Europeans and well above the ‘desperately degraded’ New Hollanders.<sup>31</sup> Arthur Hodgson, a squatter and politician, regarded New Zealanders ‘an enlightened race of men’ compared to the Aborigines.<sup>32</sup>

Sir Edward Belcher, captain of the HMS *Sulphur*, reported that the natives of the New Hebrides ‘appear to be very low in the scale of human beings’.<sup>33</sup> Roger Therry, a Supreme Court judge, claimed that the ‘intellectual endowment’ of the Aborigines was far below that of the warlike races of the South Seas.<sup>34</sup> The Aborigines were ‘not only at the very bottom of the scale of humanity’, Dr Lang concluded, ‘no other portion of the human race has ever fallen so low’.<sup>35</sup> Dumont d’Urville, a French naval officer, concluded that the Melanesians shared the lowest rung on the ladder of humanity with the Australian Aborigines, ‘probably the most limited beings, the most stupid and essentially the closest to brutes without reason’. Both races were ‘weak and miserable beings, joined together in feeble tribes, curiously disgraced by nature, and reduced by the poverty of their soil, as by their indolence and stupidity, to a very precarious existence’.<sup>36</sup>

Some readers might conclude that Boyd’s Kanakas could be described as a ‘prologue’ to the Queensland Kanaka trade from 1863 to 1904. Clive Moore, when he was a professor of history at the University of Queensland, published a historiographical survey of the Queensland

<sup>31</sup> Williams’ evidence, 29 July 1836, q 5708, SC Aborigines (British settlements).

<sup>32</sup> Hodgson, *Reminiscences of Australia*, 229

<sup>33</sup> Shineberg, *They Came for Sandalwood*. 120-1

<sup>34</sup> Therry, *Reminiscences of Thirty Years’ Residence in New South Wales*, 300.

<sup>35</sup> *Australian*, 26 January 184. Lang, *Cooksland*, 346.

<sup>36</sup> Duyker, *Dumont d’Urville*, 112, 257, 302-3 (map), 304-7, 630.

Kanaka trade in 1992. He listed 240 books, chapters in books and articles written on the Kanaka trade since 1966. Queensland's academic historians adopted what Moore described as an 'Islander-centered' approach to the history of the Kanaka trade. However, he criticised them 'as 'unthinkingly bound to firm dates, almost as if the people came out of thin air in 1863. None of these historians—Peter Corris, Deryck Scarr, Kay Saunders, Patricia Mercer, Raymond Evans—ever mentioned Boyd's Kanakas. 'We need to include as much as possible of the pre-1863 period', Moore concluded, 'to provide context from which the laborers came'.<sup>37</sup>

Boyd died 12 years before the first Kanakas landed in Queensland in 1863 and 18 years before the word 'blackbirding' appeared in a book. When John Webster's *The Last Cruise of the Wanderer* was published in 1863—also printed in the *Sydney Morning Herald*—most colonists in New South Wales would have forgotten Boyd. T. P. Pugh told the Queensland Legislative Assembly that 'we perfectly remember that Mr Benjamin Boyd deluged the colony of New South Wales with South Sea Islanders to the disgust and horror of the colonists'. By this time very few Queenslanders would have remembered Boyd.

Queensland is ten times the area of England and Wales combined. The white population 1859 consisted of 18 121 males and 11 938 females. About a third of Queensland lay in the tropics. Public opinion assumed that continuous perspiration of white labourers working on cotton and sugar plantations in tropical climates would impair their constitutions. Indeed, convicts and soldiers sent to British settlements in northern New Holland from 1824 to 1849 soon became 'feeble and exotics' who lost 'the energy of the Anglo Saxon breed'. The Colonial Office concluded that northern Australia 'did not admit any reliance on European labour'.

<sup>37</sup> Moore, 'Revising the revisionists', 61-2, 73-4.

Early Queensland ministries were dominated by wealthy ‘conservatives’ and planters eager to exploit the riches in colony’s tropical latitudes with ‘cheap’ indentured labour from Asia and the Pacific. Sir George Bowen, the first governor of Queensland, sent a memorial from planters to the Colonial Office in 1860 asking to be allowed to import Indian coolies to develop the tropical and semi-tropical regions of central and north Queensland without seeking the appropriation of public revenues. The memorial asked the Indian government to extend the immigration of indentured Indian coolies for Mauritius to Queensland. Such a measure would improve the material condition and welfare of the coolies in Queensland. The Colonial Office responded that Queensland had a British population ‘unmixed with inferior races or feeble half castes. Importing Indians should be resisted but, if employed in Queensland’s ‘hotter zone’, it would lead to ‘the all-important benefit of a supply of cotton’. The Queensland parliament passed an Act in 1862 to regulate the employment of Indian coolies in the colony. The government apparently assumed that Indian coolies could be recruited and employed under the Colonial Office regulations similar to those for Mauritius and the West Indian sugar colonies. The venture stalled after Indian and Queensland government officials could not agree on who should pay the salaries of recruiting agents in India.<sup>38</sup>

Queensland adopted the laws of New South Wales at the outset. The purpose of the New South Wales Master and Servant Act 1857 was not intended to enforce the indentures of Indian, Chinese or Pacific Islanders brought to the colony. Employers and magistrates had complained to the government that the law was ‘virtually inoperative’ with respect to Chinamen because ‘simple imprisonment’ was little felt by them. The attorney general

<sup>38</sup> Moles, ‘The Indian labour issue in Queensland, 1345-7. Parnaby, *Britain and the Labour Trade*, 121-4.

responded that he could not agree that the law be changed to recognise ‘this difference in the appreciation of punishment’ by subjecting the Chinese to ‘hard labour, low diet or occasioned solitary confinement’.<sup>39</sup>

The Queensland parliament passed the *Polynesian Labourers Act* 1868 to enforce the indentures of Kanakas brought to the colony. Recruits were to ‘sign’ a Memorandum of Agreement to work in Queensland for up to three years at wages of £6 annually, together with rations, accommodation and medical care, and were ‘to obey all lawful and reasonable commands’. Two unpaid justices of the peace sitting in a court of Petty Sessions would enforce the Act. The Kanakas were heathens who could not swear an oath on the Bible so their evidence was not admissible in court’.<sup>40</sup>

Residents of Brisbane petitioned the governor in 1869 not to allow the importation of South Sea Islanders because it would be a backward step in the direction of slavery disguised as immigration. The *Act* did not prevent deception and fraud as the uncivilised Kanakas were incapable of understanding a legal contract.<sup>41</sup> Missionaries denounced the recruiting of males only as ‘unnatural, cruel and subversive’ as it severed their domestic ties and subjected them to vicious influences. Importing an inferior race would be subversive to the constitutional principles on which the colony was founded, leading to the destitution of the white working classes and the moral and social well-being of the community.

When John Inglis met Towns in Sydney in 1863 he described him as a man of ‘average justice and humanity who had no wish to be harsh, cruel, or unjust’. Even so, Inglis

<sup>39</sup> De Salis to Towns, 4 January 1853, TP/307, 608-8. Attorney general to colonial secretary, 22 June 1853, 55/5440 in 4/3202, SARNSW.

<sup>40</sup> [Qld] 31 Vic no 47.

<sup>41</sup> Petition from Inhabitants of Brisbane, 8 March 1869, Correspondence relating to their importation of South Sea Islanders, 2.

denounced the Kanaka labour trade as the very essence of slavery, so rotten that it could never be regulated. He called on 'good Christians everywhere' to help to protect 'the poor and defenceless natives from the hands of bloody and deceitful men'. Boyd had discovered a mine of wealth for his successors in the 'grand enterprise' of the Kanaka trade which was accompanied with evils of which he could have no conception, including exterminating native populations on Pacific Islands.<sup>42</sup> A pioneering historian of Melanesia summed up the Queensland Kanaka trade as the 'most intolerable, implausible and unassailable kind of slavery, a 'violation of the rights of man, injurious to the social, moral and spiritual interests of the natives, and demoralising and degrading to the white men taking part.'<sup>43</sup>

Robert Towns was the link between Boyd's Kanakas and the Queensland Kanaka trade. Towns had employed South Sea Islanders, mostly Polynesians, from 1842 as deckhands on his six sandalwood ships, as labourers on his Sydney wharf, and his depot on the Isle of Pines. He paid Islanders in fish-hooks, razors, chisels, scissors, axes, knives, beads, tobacco and cloth. Towns lost money on importing Indian coolies recruited at Calcutta in 1846. With several partners, Towns imported 1733 Chinese coolies from Amoy for New South Wales and Victoria from 1851 to 1853. Towns attributed his overall loss of £667 in the Chinese coolie trade to the high costs of recruiting in China and shipping them to Australia. He wrote to a friend in London: 'I am afraid the Coolie trade is over. The Rascals have been so troublesome that nobody likes to employ them and our laws are so defective and punishment so trifling for such offences that they laugh at the idea of being sent to Gaol'.<sup>44</sup> When Towns sent

<sup>42</sup> Inglis, *In the New Hebrides*, 6-7, 201-3, 207-8, 215-7.

<sup>43</sup> Steel, *The New Hebrides and the Christians Missions*, 389-92.

<sup>44</sup> Towns to Marshall, 6 May, 12 July, 8 August 1853, TP 307/62, 121-2, 241, 296. Towns' evidence, 29 August 1854, qs 20, 21, SC Asiatic labor 1854. Profit and loss account 1844 May to 1855 December, TP 307/89(5), 1-4. Towns to De Salis, 4 January 1853, TP 307/61, 609.

several ships to Madras in 1854 to recruit coolies his agent informed him that the Indian government had closed a 'loophole' in the law that had allowed coolies to be recruited as 'menial' (domestic) servants.<sup>45</sup>

Towns turned to planting cotton in Queensland early in the 1860s to take advantage of rising prices during the Union's blockade of Confederate ports in the American Civil War. German immigrants working as field hands on Towns' plantation on the Logan River south of Brisbane 'became discontented and bolted, or rendered services worse than useless'. Without cheap labour, Towns argued, growing cotton in Queensland would have to be abandoned.<sup>46</sup> The cost of employing a South Sea Islander was calculated at 2s 4d a day whereas the lowest paid white labourer earned 5s 2d a day.<sup>47</sup> Towns wrote in June 1862 to a friend in London: 'I despair of either coolies or Chinese, the United States niggers I think may do, but they must be properly selected; failing in all these I have my eye on our South Sea Islanders'.<sup>48</sup> Towns apparently surmised that Boyd's venture with Kanakas had failed because these 'savage and uncivilised tribes' had been exempted from the jurisdiction the New South Wales Master and Servant Act.

Towns sent the *Don Juan* in May 1863 to recruit a hundred natives from the Loyalty Islands. He instructed Captain Crueber (Crucher) to recruit what he described as 'an industrious, tractable, and inoffensive race'. If none came forward, he was to call at Henry's station on Eromanga. Towns instructed Ross Lewin, the supercargo on the *Don Juan*

<sup>45</sup> Towns evidence, 6 November 1854, q 6; Chief secretary, Fort St George, to McDowall & Company, 5 August 1854; Council of India, Act XXIV 1852, s 3, SC Asiatic labor 1854.

<sup>46</sup> Towns, *South Sea Immigration for Cotton Culture*, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Parnaby, *Britain and the Labor Trade*, 130.

<sup>48</sup> Evans, *History of Queensland*, 99-100.

supposedly familiar with some Melanesian dialects, to tell the Loyalty Islanders that they would perform ‘the light work of field labour, in weeding and picking cotton’ for £6 a year, and returned to their islands within six to twelve months. None were to be taken against their free will, were to have proper food, and given two sets of shirts and trousers. Complying missionaries declared that Islanders had been misled by being told that they would work ‘weeding and cleaning and picking cotton’ for a short season and returned after a year.<sup>49</sup>

The arrival of the *Don Juan* at Brisbane with 67 Kanakas in August 1863 raised what Towns described as ‘a perfect hue and cry’ among the press and public. ‘I was represented as a perfect monster’, he told a New South Wales Royal Commission in 1869, ‘my proceedings were scandalous, and every vile epitaph was applied to me’.<sup>50</sup> T. P. Pugh asked the colonial secretary in Queensland’s Legislative Assembly whether Boyd’s ‘cargo of miserable wretches had been kidnapped’, adding that ‘we perfectly remember that Mr Benjamin Boyd deluged the colony of New South Wales with South Sea Islanders to the disgust and horror of the colonists’. The colonial secretary replied they ‘had come under distinctly signed contracts to work for one year’. Pugh then accused the government of ‘winking at this disgraceful transaction’. He demanded that such an unnatural traffic should be suppressed in favour of thousands of our starving fellow countrymen in the mother country seeking employment.<sup>51</sup>

A French admiral reported to his government in 1869 that the natives of the Loyalty Islands were being kidnapped by labour recruiters to work in Queensland and Fiji. The French government asked the British government to investigate these allegations. The New

<sup>49</sup> Towns, *South Sea Islander Immigration for Cotton Culture*, 2-3, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Towns’ evidence, 20 July 1869; Towns to Crueber (Crucher), 29 May 1863; Towns to Lewin, 29 May 1863; Towns to missionaries, 29 May 1863, *Report of the Royal Commission to Enquire into Certain Cases of Alleged Kidnapping of Natives of the Loyalty Islands* (1869), 26-8.

<sup>51</sup> Pugh, colonial secretary, Queensland LA, *Brisbane Courier*, 22 August 1862.

South Wales government—not the Queensland government—established a Royal Commission to inquire and report on these allegations. Some 32 witnesses said that some ‘instances of injustice and oppression’ had occurred among the Pacific Islanders. Missionaries testified that bringing Islanders to Queensland was injurious to the morals in that on returning home ‘they carry with them vices acquired by contacts with Europeans’. Employers of Kanakas testified that they were ‘fond of travelling’ and understood the nature of their engagement. Europeans disliked working on sugar plantations because of the tropical climate and it was degrading in the eyes of the white colonists. On the other hand, without Kanaka labour sugar plantations could not be profitable. The report concluded that, under proper regulation, Kanakas would advance sugar-growing interests in Queensland. None of the witnesses, including Robert Towns, ever mentioned that Ben Boyd had brought Kanakas to New South Wales in 1847.<sup>52</sup>

Kanakas unfamiliar with European notions of working regularly for wages soon become sullen and resentful. Believing they had been deceived, they complained of being overworked, short rations, and abuse and beatings by overseers. Some took revenge by burning their master’s crops, refusing to work or absconding. Those gaoled for up to three months often absconded soon after being released. Some died from hunger and exposure in the bush. Others committed suicide by hanging or drowning or lived like ‘wild beasts’ by plundering settlers. Long-serving Kanakas earning market wages could then spend weekends drinking, visiting Japanese prostitutes in brothels, gambling and brawling on the streets.

Reports of fraud, kidnapping and clashes between blackbirders and Pacific Islanders compelled Queensland and British governments to introduce ever more stringent measures

<sup>52</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission to Enquire into Certain Cases of Alleged Kidnapping of Natives of the Loyalty Islands* (1869), 4-8.



for regulating recruiting and working conditions. Two select committees and two Royal Commissions had investigated the Kanaka trade, leading to the enactment of 12 pieces of legislation to regulate it.<sup>53</sup> A Royal Commission in 1885 attributed the high mortality among Kanakas—six times more than for the white population—to ‘overwork, insufficient or improper food, lack of medical attendance, and general neglect’. The white population saw sugar plantations as ‘disease spots’ spreading dysentery and respiratory infections.<sup>54</sup>

Planters in north Queensland petitioned in 1874 and 1881 for the updating of legislation to regulate the recruiting and employment for Indian coolies. Negotiations between the Indian and Queensland governments failed to reach agreement on salaries for recruiting agents and protectors, working conditions on the plantations, male to female ratios, cancellation of contracts, and payment for return passages.<sup>55</sup> Before new regulations could be debated and ratified, Queensland’s parliament was dissolved for an election in 1882. After Griffith’s Liberals won the election his government repealed the statutes regulating the recruitment and employment of Indian labour.<sup>56</sup>

White working men and women, trade unionists and clergymen accused Kanakas of lusting after white women, spreading leprosy, ringworm and other loathsome diseases, and indulging in ‘disgusting vices’.<sup>57</sup> Popular magazines, notably the *Sydney Bulletin*, *The Worker* and *Boomerang*, published sensational articles claiming that Aborigines, Kanakas, Chinese

<sup>53</sup> Moore, *Kanaka*, 344-5.

<sup>54</sup> Reynolds, *North of Capricorn*, 145, 147, 152, 154, 157, 167, 174.

<sup>55</sup> Moles, ‘The Indian labour issue in Queensland’, 1845-58, 1361, 1367.

<sup>56</sup> Parnaby, *Britain and the Labor Trade in the Southwest Pacific*, 131-2,

<sup>57</sup> Saunders, ‘“Troublesome servants”; the strategies of resistance employed by Melanesian indentured labour on plantations in colonial Queensland’, 173-5. Saunders, ‘The Black Scourge’, 149-66. Saunders, ‘From Noble Savage to Degraded Savage’, 210-22.

and other Asians were fathering a 'mongrel' population of half-castes in northern Australia, creating 'piebald societies', and contaminating the purity of Anglo-Saxon race.

By the late 1870s the white population in south-east Queensland was able to muster enough votes at elections to challenge the Kanaka trade. The professional middle class was more concerned with the risks to 'democratic institutions and character of colonial society created by servile and alien minorities' than the extreme racial sentiments often held by workers, trade unions and popular magazines.<sup>58</sup> Samuel Griffith, a Brisbane barrister elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1872, led the Liberals to victory in November 1883 on a platform against bringing 'servile or coloured labour into Queensland'. Griffith published a 'Manifesto' in 1892 explaining that 'his opposition to Kanaka and Asian labour was not based on the colour of a men's skins but to the best interests of the colony regarded as the home of the British race'. The 'permanent existence of a large servile population amongst us, not admitted to the franchise is not compatible with the continuance of our free political institutions'.<sup>59</sup>

Planters in north Queensland campaigned for a new colony where they could employ Kanakas without interference from governments in Brisbane. However, the progress of the federation movement in the 1890s ended any prospect of importing Kanakas or other non-European indentured labourers to Queensland. The Commonwealth *Immigration Restriction Act* 1901 formally established the White Australia policy. The *Pacific Islands Labourers Act* 1901 ended the Kanaka trade and authorised the deportation of Kanakas. Some long-serving Kanakas were granted exemptions while other hid the bush but most had been deported by 1907. The 2500 or so Kanakas who stayed in Queensland fathered a mixed-race now known

<sup>58</sup> Mercer, 'Racial attitudes to Melanesians in colonial Queensland', 303-20.

<sup>59</sup> Griffith's Manifesto, *Brisbane Courier*, 13 February 1892.

as the South Sea Islander community.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Mercer & Moore, 'Australia's Pacific Islanders 1906-77', 195-8.