“Finish, I Can’t Talk Now”: Aboriginal and Settler Women Construct Each Other

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This paper addresses the often-bitter debate in Australian academic circles between settler women academics, particularly feminists, and Aboriginal scholars. The debate pertains to the ways in which gender relations in Aboriginal society—and between that society and that of the settlers—have been constructed. The author discusses the seminal literature and the protagonists in the debate, pleading for a non-ideological approach to cross-cultural understanding.

Many years ago I lived with some Aboriginal people, the group “sitting down” at Daguragu after they had gone on strike from Wave Hill Station (Northern Territory) in 1966. During my time there I camped with a Gurindji family. Sometimes during the middle of the day, or in the early evening, people would visit. We would sit around, drink tea and chat. In the course of the conversation occasionally the chat would slip into gossip about a person not present. If the gossip slipped too far into the “personal” then someone in the group, usually one of the listeners, would say: “Finish, I can’t talk now . . . .” At that point the gossip would stop, and the chat might stop too. The visit would be over.

Whenever I observed this sequence of events I was acutely aware that the person saying “Finish . . . .” had said it at a critical point in our interactions with each other. We stopped at a point where goodwill within
our group, and towards the absent subject of the comment, was still viable. When we came together again that good will should still be viable.

Introduction

This paper is based on the text of a lecture I gave at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon on Australia Day (26 January) 1995. Here, as well as at the lecture presentation, I discuss the current debate in Australian academic circles wherein Aboriginal women confront settler women (especially feminists) with the allegation that Western feminism is, in many ways, a racist ideology. The debate in Australia resonates with much I have heard expressed by First Nations women in North America. One aspect of the debate that I have found troubling is the degree of bitterness that exists. I feel that unresolved yet reconciliable differences have led to an escalation in tension between the women who argue. The debate is too important to be left to founder on rocky ideological shores. In part, I hope to suggest, through analysis of the main propositions in the often-heated discussions, some pathways to more open environment.

Creating a Nation

Early in 1994 an important book was published in Australia. Written by four women, Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quatly, it is a revisionist history describing and analyzing Australia since British settlement in 1788. The historians firmly place women on the record in their account of the movement from settlement to nation. By intention the book, Creating A Nation, is inclusive of issues directly related to gender and ethnicity.1 Because the writers have included their treatment of gender within the treatment of ethnicity, and vice versa, they have made a significant contribution to the construction of historiography in Australia.

Creating A Nation was itself created through a process whereby each historian wrote whole chapters on distinct themes that reflected their areas of expertise.2 The whole is organized chronologically. I wish to refer now to the opening chapter. It was written by Ann McGrath.

Working within the twin themes of creation and nation, McGrath introduces the reader to the early days of British settlement in Australia through an account of the birth in 1791 of an Aboriginal baby. McGrath’s source is a diary account of the events leading to the birth, the birth itself and subsequent events including the placing of the after-birth in a specially dug space near the birthing place. It is, therefore, of special note that the diary account was made by Lieutenant David Collins who had, apparently, been permitted by the mother, Warreweer, to witness the birth of her child.
Collins was accompanied by certain women of the upper ranks of settler society.

The account of the birth is used by McGrath to lead to a discussion and analysis of contemporary British observations of Aboriginal family life, and the whole is contextualized in a discussion of the importance of the place where the events being described occurred. In this part of her discussion McGrath uses ethnographic material, and other data, which place the early British settlement in its Aboriginal location. Aboriginal tribal names, clan names and place names are used. Aboriginal people, specific and named, men and women, are there in the text just as they were in the place right from the beginning of the history of Australia.

McGrath tells a story and does not discuss her sources. Some provocative comments present themselves about the fact a British naval officer wrote the account of the baby’s birth, but I will leave them unspoken here. Rather, I want to move on to another of McGrath’s texts. As an historian of northern Australia, I must acknowledge McGrath’s Born in the Cattle, a history of the pastoral industry in the Northern Territory (1890s-1930s). Born in the Cattle has a lot to say about Aboriginal workers in the pastoral industry and, in particular, about the contribution of Aboriginal women.

Constructing Women

In writing Born in the Cattle, McGrath used a source, which I have also used and gone back to a number of times – an article published in 1937 in Walkabout. The writer was Helen Skardon. The article is called “The House Gims,” and in it Skardon described the difficulties she experienced as a “missus” employing Aboriginal women (the “gins” in the title of the article) as servants. I would like to make three points about the article.

More than the content, which is slight, the tone of the article is significant for someone wishing to learn about settler constructions of Aboriginality. It is an unpleasant article, and I return to it as a touchstone of the worst end of the spectrum of Northern Territory (NT) settler women’s responses to Aboriginal women. In addition, the article is significant because it is a published account from the end of the middle phase of settlement of the NT (1900–1939). Diary and letter sources from the same period reveal a more subtle and complex picture of relationships between women. Skardon’s article stands out because it is so bitter and sarcastic, her attempts at humour are acerbic, and for me work only to tell me that here is an unhappy, frustrated, and possibly very lonely, woman. I conjecture that her desperation drove her to write and thereby expose herself, and her attitudes, to public view. Because the article is so extreme it is possible to
develop from it some sense of the scale and range of settler responses. Even so, when using it, I try to keep in mind some sense of the position of the person writing the text.

Finally, there is another factor which is relevant to my overall theme. Skardon’s article was accessible in the late 1930s to a very wide audience. *Walkabout* was a popular magazine, especially in the very “outback” it purported to describe. The letters and diaries I use as sources were not widely available. So, in her spite, Skardon contributed, whether wittingly or not I do not know, to a false construction of Aboriginal gender/culture.

**Settler Women Construct Aboriginal Women**

McGrath, in *Born in the Cattle*, described gender relationships on the pastoral frontier. In the chapter “Black Velvet,” McGrath discussed the difficult and complex question of female sexuality and argued that “white women were shocked by the black women’s more open approach to sex and felt threatened by white men’s interest.” White women were conditioned by constraints that, according to McGrath, prohibited them from openly admitting to enjoying “sex.” In my own work, “On Civilisation’s Rim...” and “Watch the White Women Fade...,” the question of relationships between Indigenous and settler women in northern Australia has also been of primary focus. As historians, McGrath and I have used official and personal archives, fiction, oral history, and other sources, in an attempt to explain what has been, and is still empirically observable in the Northern Territory—separation between Indigenous and settler women. I shall return to this point later.

Modern historians, especially revisionist historians, examine sources and texts for evidence of attitudes and values which relate specifically to earlier times. We employ skills which firstly allow us to locate ourselves in the social structures of our own time, and secondly (and hopefully) allow us to track changes in ideas and values from the earlier time forward to our own time. Our analysis leads us to examine the data for evidence, for example, of people’s consciousness of the social structures and values of their time and place. We sometimes match that contemporary assessment with our own formed in recent times. We look for shifts—continuities, changes and connections.

How can we find evidence for patterns in the lives of Indigenous women? If we wish to construct our texts based entirely on written text, we immediately encounter a difficulty. Locating written material constructed by Indigenous women in the Northern Territory, in or during the period before, say, 1930 is not only difficult, it is practically impossible. And if,
for example, we wanted to know more about the events around the birthing McGrath has written of in *Creating a Nation* we would be really stuck! We can, of course, speculate about the presence of non-family members at the birth, but we need to be all the time mindful of the importance of *time-place* in construction of cultural values. It would be unwise, I think, to extrapolate from modern understandings of modern Aboriginal life backwards, and expect precise answers to our speculations.

In recent times the search for sources about Aboriginal lives in the past has been aided by many published reminiscences and biographies, written by Aboriginal people. The quantity of these resources increases impressively year by year. On the whole, however, these are secondary sources. What if, then, we wish to balance the primary sources, to make sure, for instance, that there is a fair distribution of evidence between what settlers did and said, and what Indigenous women did and said? And, if we are sufficiently conscious of the need to locate ourselves within our ethnocentrism, how are we to find evidence generated by *Indigenous women* both about themselves and about settler women?

Over the last fifteen years or so Australian historians have begun to explore more fully the use of oral sources. And some historians have also gone to the writings of modern anthropologists and linguists. In particular, women historians have sought the work of women anthropologists who are known to have worked extensively with "traditional" Aboriginal communities, and especially with women in those communities. In my view, the works of three modern anthropologists stand out: Annette Hamilton, Diane Bell, and Francesca Merlan. Their work is not free from controversy and argument, and the women do not necessarily agree with each other at every point. And historians must be careful, as I have already said, of the dangers of extrapolating backwards in time from modern data. Having made those qualifications, however, I wish to stress that there is much in modern ethnography of value for us in our pursuit of a varied, and balanced, picture of settler relationships with Indigenous people. Later, I wish to return to mention Merlan's work, because I feel in her writings there are clues to help explain the continuing separation and to some extent, hostility between indigenous and settler women in Australia. I wish first to return to some points about our location in our ethnocentrism.

**Locating the Discourse**

Firstly, the term "ethnocentrism" in itself is one which describes a condition surely common to all people. Secondly, the negative value attributed to the term, I believe, flows from the consequences when people,
especially when they are commenting on another culture, do not sufficiently take into account their own cultural values, and the effect those values have on our perception. In addition there are problems when the values of one culture specifically block clear perception of difference! In the following discussion I will attempt to locate Australian women historians (may I insert the word “settler” before “women”?) in the cultural mores which dominate feminist academic discourse in Australia at the moment. I am basing my analysis on an assumption that we are all ethnocentric.

As a regional historian I count myself fortunate that a regional focus in history allows many points of view – social, political, economic and so on. If, however, I wish to communicate with other historians, especially women historians, I need to have an understanding of the theoretical paradigms they use. I am aware also that, at any time when I examine the lives of women in the remote Northern Territory, I am affected by the current debates within universities about feminist theory. As we shall see later in this discussion, I am not alone in simultaneously being both on the margin of the debate, and subject to its rigours. Perhaps my sense of being on the margin helps me to understand a little of the way in which Aboriginal women academics are responding to the feminist discourse.

Australian feminists, academic feminists in particular, have made a not inconsiderable contribution to western feminist theory. In a rush of female chauvinism I acknowledge here Germaine Greer, who did so much to stimulate discussion and debate in the 1970s with The Female Eunuch. It became a populist text. Greer continues to speculate, stimulate, and irritate. More recently, Carole Pateman, located within an entirely academic environment, has continued the pattern. Anna Yeatman reviewing Pateman’s The Sexual Contract said in her opening sentence that it “is an important book.” Yeatman continued: “It represents an historically important juncture in the development of contemporary feminist thought.”

I do not intend to review, or interpret, Pateman here; my point is more about the effect, or influence, of The Sexual Contract and other of Pateman’s writing, than their content. At the moment in Australia, academic women working in humanities and social sciences would find it difficult to ignore or avoid Pateman, presuming they might want to. A case in point is the recently published (1993) collection of papers Women and the State edited by Renate Howe. Howe acknowledges in her introduction Pateman’s contribution to the discussion about the way “women have been differentially incorporated into the state and their public contribution devalued.” Five of the eight articles in the publication (Marian Sawyer, Marian Quartly, Alison Mackinnon, Eleanor Hancock and Ann McGrath) refer to Pateman’s analysis, and some overtly acknowledge Pateman’s influence.
Within a context that demands acknowledgements of modern feminist writings, Australian (settler) women historians examine the past and try to understand, *inter alia*, the role and contribution of women in relation to the settlement and development of Australia since 1788. We look at our settler foremothers and see if we are able to trace connections from them to our present selves. Recently, and where we can, we have tried to construct a history inclusive of Aboriginal women. We experience difficulty.

Part of the problem we have is connected to our culture. In examining our foremothers from a feminist (or post-feminist) present we are bound to be influenced by ideas about the separation between the genders in our culture. This division between settler men and settler women is present today, and is apparent in our historic past. Indeed, the division was in place and so marked by the early twentieth century that an American social commentator, Jessie Ackerman, wrote about it. The division has been *divisive* and has in part transposed to gender relations in other cultures. Modern Australian women and men live not only in ways which show marked separation; the separation can be described as oppositional, and even hostile.

Feminist theory acknowledges, defines, describes, and extrapolates from the common experience of modern Australian society. The theory is necessarily ethnocentric. It has, however, been very useful to settler academics (women) who have sought to understand settler society in the late eighteenth, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Aboriginal women academics are currently disputing the value of that analysis as applied to Aboriginal society over the same period.

The Tiddas Manifesto

I started this commentary with references to the work of historian Ann McGrath and I have referred throughout to McGrath's writing. This is no coincidence. Part of the context within which I have been working is a debate going on in Australia about the ways settler women historians construct Indigenous women. One of the protagonists in the debate, an Aboriginal woman academic, Jacki Huggins, has specifically named two settler academics: Ann McGrath (historian) and Diane Bell (anthropologist). Huggins claims that McGrath and Bell in their writings typify settler (academic) attitudes that she, as an Aboriginal woman and an academic, finds racist and patronising.

In the late 1980s Indigenous women scholars began to break their silence. They entered into public dispute with settler academics about the feminist gendering of social relations which involved Aboriginal people.
There have been arguments from both “sides” on radio and in academic journals. One day someone might construct a history of the debate, here I wish to discuss some of the views I have heard expressed by Aboriginal women. Specifically I wish to refer to two radio programs broadcast in the *Coming Out Show* (Women’s Broadcast Unit, ABC), one in 1990, the other in 1993.

The first program – “Are All the Women White?” – broadcast in September 1990, was in two parts. It was one of four in a series devoted to an analysis of current feminist theory. During the first section Eve Fe sl, an Aboriginal academic, in discussion with non-Aboriginal women, commented: “Personally, I’ve experienced more discomfort from racism from white women than I have sexism from black men.” Fesl also expressed her annoyance with the assumption she saw being made by settler feminists that Aboriginal and White women share the same problems.

In the second section of the same broadcast, Jackie Huggins, in conversation with Afro-American feminist Bell Hooks, claimed that in Australia some settler feminists were first beginning to acknowledge race as an issue. Huggins commented that Aboriginal women had been excluded from the feminist debate for so long that “we do not want to be party to it anymore.” Both Fesl and Huggins stressed the need for settler women, especially feminists, to learn from Aboriginal women “as much as we know about being Aboriginal women.”

Three years later the “Tiddas Manifesto” was declared by two Aboriginal women studying at universities in the Australian state of Victoria. Katrina Felton (Monash University) and Liz Flannagan (Melbourne University) spoke at the *Lilith Feminist Journal* Conference “Dealing with Difference: Women and Ethnicity” in Melbourne in 1993. Part of the conference proceedings were broadcast on the *Coming Out Show*.

Felton and Flannagan redefined issues already discussed in the 1990 programme. They both expressed their irritation with “mainstream feminism” and the way in which they personally had been subjected to White academics “preserving their right to talk about feminism.” In delivering her section of the manifesto Liz Flannagan said: “As Koori women we aim to set our own culturally specific agenda and place our oppression within its racial, historical and political context.” Katrina Felton echoed this sentiment in her section:

If we keep being told by white bureaucrats, white feminists, and white government, what the solutions to our problems are, we will never be self-determining – for white people can only offer a framework, and a method of analysis, that is radically different to
our own. If we continue to listen to white analysis of our oppression we will begin to question our own reality and our objectives will become suppressed.\textsuperscript{18}

Later at the same conference Aboriginal historian Jackie Huggins and settler historian Kay Saunders (both from University of Queensland) spoke to their paper “Defying the Ethnographic Ventrioloquist: Race, Gender and the Legacies of Colonialism.”\textsuperscript{19} Huggins’s part of the joint presentation was broadcast on the same program as the “Tiddas Manifesto.” Again, Huggins particularised settler feminist historian Ann McGrath and anthropologist Diane Bell. In a striking image the presentation depicted feminist academics as ventrioloquists putting words into the mouths of Aboriginal women.\textsuperscript{20}

Discussion

Apart from stating their frustration at not being heard, I hear these Aboriginal women express deep dissatisfaction at the way settler feminist academics have gendered relationships between Aboriginal women and Aboriginal men. Those relationships, with all attendant joys and problems, are being defined from within a feminist perspective that casts female-male interactions as part of the paradigm of an oppressive patriarchy, or, post-Pateman, the “fratriarchy”! In the later paradigm women are dominated, oppressed and manipulated by men acting in brotherhood. Fraternity excludes women.

If I understand Huggins and Fesl correctly, based in a context provided by my reading of interpretative texts by anthropologist Francesca Merlan,\textsuperscript{21} then Aboriginal women do not perceive gender relationships within their communities as divided and divisive. They argue, in fact, that their rejection of feminist interpretations is more than a matter of academic debate: their arguments are based on actual experience as women within Aboriginal culture, and on specific Aboriginal laws. Problems such as alcoholism do affect those relationships, but alcohol dependence, or substance abuse, not gender-defined oppression, is the problem. In addition, Aboriginal women argue that those problems are to be dealt with, indeed \textit{are being} dealt with, in ways that are culturally appropriate and are defined by Aboriginal people within Aboriginal communities. Further, they argue that much of modern feminist analysis of historical events displays an insensitivity to the cultural specificity of the relationship between women and men in Aboriginal society.

I wish to conjecture here that there are two essential elements in Aboriginal culture which feminist historians, but not necessarily feminist anthropologists, have so far failed to come to terms with. The first is the
gender asymmetry within Aboriginal society, and the other is the centrality of sexuality to maturity in law for women within Aboriginal culture. Inherent in Aboriginal culture is an area of women’s “business,” based on religious/political/social/economic practice, which is exclusively a woman’s realm where women have authority and autonomy, where men are not necessarily excluded (Merlan states that “separation is jointly enacted”), and which is part of the whole of Aboriginal culture—not divided from it.

In the article “Male-Female Separation,” Merlan argues that women anthropologists (and men, too) have simplified Aboriginal society by emphasizing separation between men and women in that society without taking into account the social context in which the separation occurs. What is significant in the article is Merlan’s focus, specifically stated, on women as social actors in the whole context of Aboriginal society. Merlan states:“Gender” cannot be adequately characterized abstractly and holistically as difference between male and female, or even between men and women, but rather must be understood as one of the dimensions or moments of action in which social differentiation is constantly reproduced and altered.

Further to that, Merlan comments that her observations of women's sex-separate ritual events in northern Australia have led her to conclude “that, although sex-separate action is central to these events, it is crucial that such action is centrally focused on intersexual relations.” Her article then goes on to describe and analyze in detail her observations of recent (1980s) ritual events in northern Australia. The events are, as Merlan notes, localized, but evidence drawn from other anthropologists indicates that the underlying social structures and social actions she has observed are generally present in “traditional” Aboriginal society.

Merlan’s article describes ritual events important to my overall argument in this paper—the heading for her ethnographic description is “Love Magic and Separation: An Account.” Aboriginal women come to sexual maturity through participation in these rituals that are “women’s business,” and that include men in certain aspects of the ritual. It must be stressed here that the actions and direction of the ritual are matters women control.

I cannot argue that “urban” Aboriginal women still participate in similar rituals (simply, I do not know if they do or do not). When I hear Aboriginal women construct settler women, I hear them express sympathy for “the other,” for women who do not have such an area of exclusivity within the inclusive whole. In addition, I have heard comment precisely about the relative insignificance of settler women’s (for which read Anglo-and Celtic-Australian) sexuality in the whole that comprises settler society.
What I have not yet heard is Aboriginal women say that their view of “the other” is the one that must be adopted by “the other” before there is creative dialogue.

In the early settler world, before the feminist critique was available, there was, even then, a separation between Aboriginal and settler women. Here I would like to add a few speculative thoughts. Perhaps settler women sensed, rather than understood, that Aboriginal women had a power and autonomy in their own society which was in part derived from the human characteristic settler women had been taught to despise—sexuality. In other words settler women had sensed that Aboriginal women were not, as McGrath argued, simply more open in their approach to sex; rather, they were women in religious, social, and political spheres precisely because they were also mature sexually. Modern feminist analysis, while perhaps being apt for settler societies, fails in its understanding of Aboriginal society because settler feminists have missed the point.

Speculation leads me to a second point. Historically—i.e. throughout the history of Australia since 1788—Aboriginal women were culturally “other” in their relationships with settler men and were thereby empowered to use their own cultural values in negotiating relationships with them. It does not of course necessarily follow from this that settler men either respected and understood Aboriginal values any better than settler women had. (Indeed it has been argued that settler men often callously exploited the opportunity presented by the “otherness” of Aboriginal women, but that is not the focus here). Settler women then were caught in a double bind: their role in settler communities, especially in northern Australia, included a cultural imperative to “civilize,” and to mediate relationships between Aboriginal women and settler men, and they were asked by their own society to achieve these goals in a context beyond their understanding and their control. The effect of the double bind continues, and we are left with an analytical tool which has no valid application to either of the two sets of gender relationships, that is those within Aboriginal society, and those within settler society.

To sum up the argument today, we as settler women academics, have gained an advantage over our foremothers—we now have an analytical framework with which to examine social relations in settler society. In our enthusiasm for the theory we have sometimes failed to identify its cultural specificity. When we apply the theory, without modification, to another culture we stand open to the charge of racism. We still lack adequate means of fully understanding gender relations within Aboriginal society and between that society and our own. Curiously, we have so far been quite reluctant to hear our Aboriginal sisters on this matter.
Conclusion

Even if Aboriginal and settler women could agree on some of the major points of difference between us, we would still face the historiographic problem of the lack of documentary/textual evidence for periods prior to the early twentieth century. We would need also to be careful about the dangers of extrapolating both outwards to the “other” with whom we share this present space, and backwards to all those “others” in another space and time.

We could, however, agree about the technical problems implicit in the academic methodologies and paradigms we work within. Limitations of these kinds, recognized and located, need not frustrate creative scholarship and mutually acceptable constructions of the past. To achieve that, I would argue, we all need to be transparent about our ideologies, agendas, and manifestos, to listen to each other, and at the point when ideology begins to take over the discourse to say:

Finish, I can’t talk now . . .

Notes

The author is grateful to Professors Jim Miller and Jim Handy, Department of History, University of Saskatchewan, for their invitation to visit Saskatoon and for their constructive comments and suggestions on the text of the lecture.

1 Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Anne McGrath, and Marian Quarly, Creating a Nation (McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books, 1994). Since giving this lecture I have become aware that Creating a Nation has been the subject of some critical academic debate in Australia. This is a natural consequence of such an ambitious project. There is a review by Kay Saunders in Australian Historical Studies 103 (October, 1994): 307–8. See also A. Curthoys, S. Garton and R. Francis, “Three Views on Creating a Nation,” Labour History 68 (May, 1995): 196–208.

2 During a visit to the Northern Territory University in September 1994 Professor Marian Quarly presented a seminar on the creation of Creating A Nation. During the seminar Professor Quarly described the processes her group had followed.

3 Grimshaw et al., Creating A Nation, chapter 1, passim.


6 Ibid., p. 73.

8 Swain’s A Place for Strangers is relevant here. In his book, Swain demonstrates how modern ethnographic data can be used, in conjunction with historical records, to show how Aboriginal society has changed since 1788. The book is flawed in its argument in some places (especially in respect of coastal north Australia), but so original in its approach that it is “essential reading.”

9 I am using the word “traditional” here to distinguish between communities of Aboriginal people within a settled urban setting and Aboriginal communities in remote areas where Aboriginal language prevails in a social setting regulated by Aboriginal law and custom. These latter I am terming “traditional.” There is an interesting discussion about the dilemma facing Aboriginal women wishing to maintain traditions in a modern setting in Lesley Mearns, “To Continue the Dreaming: Aboriginal Women’s Traditional Responsibilities in a Transformed World” in E.S. Burch and L.J. Ellanna (eds.), Key Issues in Hunter-Gatherer Research (Oxford: Berg, 1994).


11 Renate Howe (ed), Women and the State: Australian Perspectives (La Trobe University Press, 1993).

12 Jessie Ackerman, Australia from a Woman’s Point of View, facsimile reprint (Sydney: Cassell Australia, 1981; original edition London: Cassell, 1913).


14 “Are All the Women White?” broadcast in The Coming Out Show (ABC Women’s Broadcasting Unit) in September 1990 – taken from an ABC tape recording of the broadcast. Fesl’s comment resonated because I have heard similar remarks made by other first-nations women in Australia, and in Canada.

15 Ibid.

16 Huggins.

17 The Coming Out Show (ABC Women’s Broadcasting Unit) July 1993, taken from an ABC recording of the broadcast.

18 Ibid.

19 The paper by Huggins and Saunders was subsequently published in Lilith: A Feminist Journal, no. 8 (summer 1993): 60–70.
20 During the conference sections that were later broadcast, speakers referred to
the Bell and Nelson 1989 article and, in part, to the subsequent controversy.

The experience of having words put into one's mouth is not restricted to
Aboriginal women. In 1993 I found myself "making statements" in footnotes in
an article published in a feminist journal that I had not myself written in my text.
There was also a comment added to the body of my text that I had not written.
The effect of this was to make me out to be a great deal smarter than I am, but
also bent my meaning to suit some unstated editorial purpose.

21 Francesca Merlan, "Gender in Aboriginal Social Life: A Review," in R.M.
Berndt and R. Tonkinson (eds.), Social Anthropology and Australian Aboriginal
Studies: A Contemporary Overview (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988),
pp. 15–76; "Male-Female Separation and Forms of Society in Aboriginal
Merlan builds on work by other anthropologists. While not agreeing with their
conclusions, Merlan generously acknowledges and discusses work by Annette
Hamilton and Diane Bell, among others. Readers could refer to Bell's classic
study, Daughters of the Dreaming (2nd ed., Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993) and
to Annette Hamilton, "Dual Social Systems: Labour and Women's Secret Rites

22 Merlan, "Male-Female Separation and Forms of Society in Aboriginal Australia,"

23 Ibid., and Merlan, "Gender in Aboriginal Social Life," passim.


25 Ibid., p. 170.

26 Ibid., p. 171.

27 Ibid., p. 178.

28 Ibid., p. 43.

29 Riddett, "Guarding Civilisation's Rim," and "Watch the White Women Fade."