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# Modern by analogy: modernity, Shoah and the Tasmanian genocide

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## Beginnings

One of the themes developed in this article concerns the consolidation of modernity in Tasmania, an island state member of the national federation of Australia. The process of social change and transformation designated by that term is now widely regarded as world-historical. But along with the recognition that modernity remains a salient tool with which to theorise the social realities of the contemporary world has come a tendency to use the concept as if it applied to an originary set of social events that are only ever *replicated* in non-European settings (see particularly Giddens, 1990; Habermas, 1987). In fact, it will be shown that modernities exist firmly in the plural. As Dilip Gaonkar argues in *Alternative Modernities*, different time–space locations produce their own specific modernities, alike but ultimately irreducible to the original European version. This study, then, charts the functioning of one of those alternative modernities, but in doing so gestures outwards to the many different sets of socio-cultural configurations that are known by that name. For readers without an interest in or a prior knowledge of Tasmanian history, this argument might be taken as a kind of instantiative study, an analysis of the different paths to modernity within a given spatio-temporal configuration, but ultimately, not restricted to that immediate place. For anyone else, it can be taken as a kind of cultural history of a specific aspect of this intriguing island's passage to the present. Colonial genocide, which forms the other topos of the investigation here, is only now becoming more fashionable as a research topic, as evidenced by the arrival of the *Journal of Genocide Research*. The Holocaust, of course, remains at the top of the list of topics to study in the Western humanities. The significance of genocide for an understanding of one's own civility is unprecedented, and the Tasmanian instance that is catalogued here is only made the more interesting by virtue of its intensity, completeness and rapidity. The conjuncture between genocide and modernity needs to be considered by anyone interested in the process of social development and the idea of moral progress. Unless one becomes fully informed about this horrific topic, one cannot be sure that one will remain alert to its reappearance. And this of course would be a monumental tragedy.

If by modernity one means the ways of life or modes of social organisation that have characterised Western civilisation since the seventeenth or eighteenth century—democratic governance, capitalist economy, industrial technology, state bureaucracy, bourgeois or new humanist individualism and feminism in all its different waves—then locating Tasmania within the matrix of modernity would involve the relatively simple task of identifying the particular instantiations of these logics to be found here, in this place that Christopher Koch once tellingly described as an "off shore island, off the shore of an off-shore continent" (1985, p 25). As one makes one's way down the list of such characteristics, ticking and crossing the boxes as required, one might conclude that Tasmania, like the rest of the "Western" world, is now entering a phase of postmodernity or even of globalisation. Yet one would also surely agree that for some of its history, at least, Australia's island state has been an emphatically modern site.

One would certainly not be taking any risks in affirming such a position. After all, the model of modernity that finds its locus classicus in seventeenth or eighteenth century Europe is subscribed to, in a schematic way at least, by theorists as diverse as Anthony Giddens, Alasdair Macintyre, Jürgen Habermas, Zygmunt Bauman, David Frisby, Peter Wagner, Krishnan Kumar, Marshall Berman, Rita Felski and Dipesh Chakrabarty. As Giddens famously argues:

> Modernity refers to modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which became more or less worldwide in their influence. This associates modernity with a time period and with an initial geographic location, but for the moment leaves its major characteristics safely stowed away in a black box. (1990, p 1)

It must be noted of course that in agreeing on the basic character of the term that sits at the centre of their various intellectual endeavours, this group of thinkers is, to an extent, only establishing a provisional common ground that might then be made the site of radical contestation. By bracketing them together, it is not intended to suggest that they agree on anything other than the very basic contours of the modernity around which their various scholarly enterprises revolve. That they should all be writing about modernity only testifies to the radical incorrigibility of that term, to its polysemic character, and to the remarkable plasticity which sees it retain a unifying salience even as it is deployed in a multiplicity of contexts. Indeed, the modernities of Bauman and Macintyre, of Giddens and Berman, of Felski and Wagner are almost impossible to reconcile with one another. Each of these scholars writes about a different modernity, and writes about it in a different way. There is no single hermeneutic algorithm that might translate their assays into a common language. Or is there?

Of course, the path that is being set out on here has already been pre-figured by the suggestion that there are a set of basic contours that this variegated constellation of modernities has in common. It may turn out that the isolation of these categories will leave us with a model so schematic as to be of negligible value. If this is so, one must grit one's teeth and persevere. An alternative strategy to synthesise the multiplicity of modernities into a single coherent whole must be disqualified

on the grounds of its untenability. Such an approach would leave one, on the one hand, with a model of modernity that was hopelessly reductionist and, on the other, with one which was impossibly unwieldy.

So, taking due note of these complications, what sort of things might one be able to include in a list of modernity's basic attributes?

First of all, in its original manifestation at least, modernity is a European phenomenon. Second, it is an historical form whose inaugural moment is to be found some time in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. Third, it proposes a distinction between the social reality and subjective experience to which it gives its name, and the antecedent medieval, archaic, classical or traditional orders that it defines itself against. It is, as Krishan Kumar writes, "a contrast concept" (1995, p 66).

Already then one is confronted with a set of problems. What is the status of Tasmania's modernity in the context of its geographical estrangement from Europe? How should one approach the fact that until its colonisation in the early nineteenth century, Tasmania remained the domain of a set of (non)modern civilisations par excellence? Can the differentiation that gives modernity its salience as a period-ising term be located in a process of socio-cultural supercession and assimilation, or must the transformation that it names be an endogenous one? Does Tasmania have a local pre-modern history, or is its pre-modernity to be found in Europe's past? Could one say, following Giddens, that modernity was brought to Tasmania with the European colonisers? Is Tasmanian modernity one case of the general type—colonial modernity? Or is modernity a set of institutional dimensions and structures of feeling that relate to their initial conditions of possibility in the mode of a simulacra, as a series of copies without an original? Has the European-ness of modernity been effaced by its subsequent world-wide dissemination?

In this study, two treatises on modernity are tackled that manage to strike a rare balance between theoretical sophistication and empirical awareness, moulding the two into something like the practice that John Cash has described as "theory with an empirical intent" (1996, p 3). These texts are Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust* and Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincialising Europe: Post-colonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Both of these monographs propose a replacement and substitution of one form of modernity for another. For Bauman, the exchange is restricted to a shuffling of the deck from which he was dealt his post-enlightenment Western hand. A critical European modernity whose pedigree can be traced back to Nietzsche, Weber and the Frankfurt School is swapped for an equally European modernity that optimistically "reaf-firms and reinforces the etiological myth of modern civilisation as a triumph of reason over passions" (Bauman, 1989, p 19). Chakrabarty's project is of an altogether different order. He moves beyond the territories of what he calls an "imaginary" Europe, to develop a "political modernity" that subverts the logic of imperialist historicity:

Historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather . . . some-thing that became global over time, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading

outside of it. This "first in Europe, then elsewhere" structure of global historical time was historicist; different non-Western nationalisms would later produce local versions of the same narrative, replacing Europe by (cit) some locally constructed center. (2000, p 7)

It should also be noted that the projects of Bauman and Chakrabarty play themselves out within quite distinct disciplinary boundaries. Bauman's target is a sociological modernity, while Chakrabarty's is a historical, or, more properly, a postcolonial, Marxist and deconstructive-historiographical one. This highlights the fact that modernity's conceptual polysemy derives in part from its currency within a number of different intellectual traditions. The difficulty one has already experienced in attempting to isolate a working definition of modernity that takes account of the diversity of its signification while remaining succinct and pliable is further exacerbated by this interdisciplinarity. But risk and return address one another in the form of a positive correlation. Within a field of "normal" capitalist transactions, the riskier the investment, the greater the potential rewards. This is an interdisciplinary axiom that might be successfully applied to this current problem of interdisciplinarity.

The second focus of this study will examine the implications of these substitutions for the formulation of strategies with which to read a specifically Tasmanian modernity. The empirical counterpoint to the theoretical movement of Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust* is his reading of the genocidal policies of National Socialism. A European genocide that was modern to its bootstraps, he argues, must finally lay to rest those optimistic enlightenment narratives that make modernisation synonymous with civilisational progress. Putting to one side the distinct possibility that this hegemonic modernity is really just a straw man—does Francis Fukayama even advocate such a cheery historical teleology any more?—the symmetry of Bauman's logic provides a useful template, an indispensable set of formal parameters, for a reading of Tasmanian modernity. If a European genocide can act so decisively as a fulcrum for a displacement and revision of European modernity, could the analysis of a Tasmanian genocide not provide a way into thinking the particular modernity that is the principle focus here? If the Holocaust is the ultimate test of (European) modernity, is the extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines the ultimate test of a still uncertain Tasmanian modernity?

## Defining genocide in modernity or, problems of periodisation

In *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Zygmunt Bauman argues that the "Final Solution" provides the grounds for a thorough-going renovation of dominant sociological conceptualisations of modernity. However, he adds, this urgent need for re-assessment and re-evaluation has been largely resisted by those who would be most expected to respond to its demands. Professional sociologists, argues Bauman, have rejected the Holocaust's potential efficacy as a spur for the re-configuration of their discipline's epistemological framework, and have adopted, instead, a number of strategies—exoticisation, marginalisation, singularisation—that

confine it neatly within extant boundaries. What might thus have presented as a case for a disorientating revision of established sociological categories is disavowed, belitttled, misjudged and shrugged off in Bauman's terms; and the concept of modernity that should have been the focus of the revision remains salient and largely intact. The referent designated by this usage of modernity is the social configuration produced by the inexorable development of human communities from the Hobbesian state of nature to the rational, technological, capitalist present, and it too is preserved and protected from the criticisms that should, in the light of the nightmare scenario of the Holocaust, be assaulting it from all angles.

Formulating a position that is part Nietzsche, part Max Weber and part Adorno and Horkheimer, Bauman makes modernity synonymous with the enlightenment and then posits its growing self-consciousness as the necessary logic of its development:

> We can think of modernity as of a time when order—of the world, of the human habitat, of the human self, and of the connection between all three—is reflected upon; a matter of thought, of concern, of a practice that is aware of itself, conscious of being a conscious practice and wary of the void it would leave were it to halt or merely relent. (1991, p 5)

While acknowledging a debt to the formulation that lies at the heart of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—"enlightenment is mythic fear turned radical . . . nothing at all may remain outside because the mere idea of outsideness is the very source of fear" (1991, p 16)—Bauman attempts to revamp Adorno and Horkheimer's opulent project by reversing its thesis. Rather than extinguishing any trace of its own self-consciousness, the enlightenment's dialectical unfolding has, on Bauman's terms, actually engendered a paralysing auto-critique. The critical reason that was supposed to act as a lever for the betterment of mankind has instead turned back upon itself to reveal a dire legacy of "blind arrogance, high-handedness and legislative dreams" (1991, p 17). This legacy is the same pile of debris that Walter Benjamin's Angel of History would like to "make whole again." Like the Angel, the enlightenment project is tossed about in a storm called progress, a storm of its own making. It too has its back turned toward the future as it tries desperately to keep in sight a paradise that recedes ever further into the irretrievable past:

> Modernity is what it is—an obsessive march forward not because it always wants more, but because it never gets enough; not because it grows more ambitious and adventurous but because its adventures are bitter and frustrated. (1991, p 10)

Bauman brings into relief the glaring discrepancy between this formulation of modernity and the one that he nominates as the orthodox social theoretical position by testing the two concepts against the historical logic of the Holocaust. Advocates of the orthodox position, he argues, preserve the saliency of their chosen definition of modernity by reading the Holocaust as a fundamentally anti-modern set of events, or even worse, as a case of the return of a normally repressed pre-modernity:

> Having processed the facts of the Holocaust through the mill of that methodology which defines it as a scholarly discipline, orthodox sociology can only deliver a message bound

more by its presuppositions than "by the facts of the case": . . . the Holocaust was a failure, not a product of modernity. (1989, p 5)

The modernity that remains isolated and immune from the ramifications of the Holocaust is the modernity that marks the culmination of what Richard Bernstein calls "the emancipatory narrative of dynamic reason actualising itself in history" (1985, p 6). It remains immune and self-contained, however, only through an obfuscation and disavowal of the unassimilable horrors that would otherwise cloud its optimistic outlook. By interpreting the attempted extermination of the Jewish peoples as the eruption of an anti-modern, irrational, atavistic malice, the defenders of this concept of modernity actually cleanse the category of its ambivalence. Modernity may have failed in the case of the Holocaust, but an examination of its failure under such anomalous conditions is actually a step toward the restoration of our faith in its normal conditions of operation:

> If the lesson of mass murder does teach us anything it is that the prevention of similar hiccups of barbarism evidently requires still more civilising efforts. There is nothing in this lesson to cast doubt on the future effectiveness of such efforts and their ultimate results. We certainly move in the right direction perhaps we do not move fast enough. (Bauman, 1989, p 13)

But, argues Bauman, it is precisely here that an intervention must be made. On his formulation, the Holocaust was not a perversion of modernity, but rather "a rare yet significant and reliable test of the hidden possibilities of modern society" (1989, p 12). For Bauman, the Holocaust must be made to re-configure the category of modernity so that it can accommodate the ambiguity of events which violate its most dearly held values—in this case the sanctity of the lives of an entire race of peoples—even when that violation is achieved through the application of technologies, intellectual, organisational and mechanical, that it alone has made possible:

> Having emancipated purposeful action from moral constraints, modernity rendered genocide possible. Without being the sufficient cause of the genocide, modernity is its necessary condition. The ability to co-ordinate human actions on a massive scale, a technology that allows one to act effectively at a large distance from the object of action, minute division of labour which allows for spectacular progress in expertise on the one hand, accumulation of knowledge incomprehensible to the layman and the authority of science which grows with it, the science sponsored mental climate of instrumental rationality that allows social-engineering designs to be argued and justified . . . are all integral attributes of modernity; but they also condition the displacement of the moral by the instrumental action and thus make genocide possible to accomplish—if only there are forces around determined to accomplish it. (1989, p 50)

An objective like the annihilation of the European Jewry could only be brought to realisation when granted a legitimate position within the administrative field of a modern state well accustomed to the bracketing of ethical concerns and the implementation of policy along purely instrumental lines. The pragmatics of the Holocaust, Bauman argues, were given their shape by the institutional contours of three distinct yet interrelated topi: bureaucratic rationality of the kind described

by Max Weber, the technologies and infrastructures of industrial capitalism and the applied knowledge of sophisticated empirical science. In administering the death camps, the institutional bearers of these intellectual and technical resources were, in a certain macabre sense, only applying their already formidable competencies to a new object. That the final product of this labour was so monstrously incongruous with the "normal" objective of a state bureaucracy only highlights the universal applicability of the capacity to suspend value judgements and to work assiduously toward the achievement of an externally determined objective outlined by hierarchically superior subjectivities. It was in the subordination of this morbid end to its rather banal means of realisation, argues Bauman, that the "Final Solution" became so characteristically modern:

> In fact we know of many massacres, pogroms, mass murders indeed instances not far removed from genocide, that have been perpetrated without modern bureaucracy, the skills and technologies it commands, and the scientific principles of its internal management. The Holocaust, however, was clearly unthinkable without such bureaucracy. (1989, p 17)

In what follows, a reading of one of these "massacres" perpetrated without modern bureaucracy is conducted. As will be shown, the decimation and displacement of the Tasmanian Aborigines does not fit the bureaucratic profile of a modern genocide delineated by Bauman. But this does not mean that it was not a modern set of events. By making recourse to a model of political modernity informed primarily by Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincialising Europe* an alternative framework for thinking the modernity of the demographic disaster enacted in Tasmania from 1804 onwards will be proposed.


## Re-reading the Black War

The historiography of the invasion of Tasmania can be neatly divided into two groups. On one side are those interpretations which read the trajectory of Tasmania's colonisation as the story of a lopsided struggle between modernity and pre-modernity. James Bonwick's *The Last of the Tasmanians*, Clive Turnbull's *Black War*, Tom Haydon's *The Last Tasmanian: A Story of Genocide* and a variety of works by N. J. B. Plomley construct a narrative in which an advanced European nation finds its uninspired program for the establishment of a penal colony/pastoral station on the island we now call Tasmania, frustrated by a rather ragged population of indigenous inhabitants. While initially accommodating to the white interlopers, repeated instances of ill-treatment at the hands of the "settlers" finally galvanise the autochthons into action. As disease and distress slowly eat away at their numbers, they conduct a resourceful campaign of resistance, only to succumb, in teleological fashion, to the inexorable narrative logic set in motion by the invasion. According to this version of events, from the moment Governor King signed off on the decision to set up a penal colony in Van Diemen's Land, the Tasmanian Aborigines were doomed to decimation, capitulation and, in the final instance, administered extinction at the hands of an uninterested British bureaucracy. More recent scholarship has taken a different approach. By exposing

the "extinction thesis" as a false conclusion to the story of the Black War, Lyndall Ryan, Henry Reynolds and Cassandra Pybus seek to displace an historical narrative fatalistically over-determined by its misconstrued finale. On this perspective, the demographic disaster, as Reynolds calls it, should be retrieved from the genre of heroic tragedy and recast as an episode in an ongoing history of relations between indigenous and non-indigenous Tasmanians. The destruction of the aboriginal cultures of Tasmania was never a *fait accompli.* To treat it as an inevitability is to go some way toward exonerating those whose actions, or in the case of the colonial administrators, inaction, coalesced to produce the set of events which in hindsight appear so pre-determined.

In her book *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, Ryan cites at least three moments when the apparently inexorable logic of Aboriginal displacement and decimation might have been averted: before the agricultural phase of British occupation began in 1807, before the rapid expansion of the pastoralist phase from 1820 onwards, and in 1827, when Governor Arthur first mooted the possibility of conciliation with and resettlement of the indigenous inhabitants in the North-East corner of the State (1996, pp 78, 81, 94). The outcome that Turnbull, Plomley and Bonwick read as the necessary corollary of a lopsided clash between incommensurable civilisations is thus revealed to be contingent. Just as for Bauman modernity was the necessary but not the sufficient cause of the Jewish Holocaust, Ryan's research shows that the colonisation of Tasmania created the conditions of possibility, but did not make inevitable, the slaughter of the Tasmanian Aborigines.

A second product of this strategy is the deconstruction and dispersal of what was, on the older model, figured as a unified historical "event." Instead of a foregrounded singularity—extinction—made up of a multiplicity of subordinated instances of mortality, this more dynamic reading of the Tasmanian genocide brings into relief the heterogeneity of deadly encounters between the colonisers and the Aborigines. As Plomley points out in Appendix Four of *Friendly Mission*, the Aborigines died in numerous ways: from the introduction of European disease, as a result of the occupation by settlers of the tribal hunting grounds and areas in which food was obtained, and at the hands of bushrangers, police, the army, the judiciary, sealers, shepherds and stockmen. Their numbers were also lowered by the removal of women from tribes for prostitution and slavery and from the general disruption of tribal life due to the above causes and due to the lack of regulated contact with the Europeans (1966, p 964).

But an advocation of the extinction thesis is also the most obvious means by which to approach a conceptualisation of the history of violent relations between the indigenous and non-indigenous Tasmanians as a history of genocide. A genocidal relation is assymetrical and non-reciprocal. It describes a set of events in which a unified collective subject deliberately sets out to eliminate an equally unified collective other, or not-subject, that is restrained from inverting the relationship. The emphasis Bauman places on the function of the modern bureaucracy in the realisation of the objective of the Holocaust derives from the capacity of that administrative apparatus to produce these two collective entities. As the instrument for the implementation of policies of the state, bureaucracy gives

body-political flesh to the abstract directives of the legislative branch of government. The state is the collective subject *par excellence*, but it cannot enforce its symbolic agency without the pragmatic aptitudes of the bureaucracy. Racial ideology might provide a rationale for the *conceptualisation* of a unified object of genocide, but the *concrete production* of that unified other relies upon the coordination of a set of administrative practices that can be carried out in a formulaic way across a variety of space–time locations. The same can also be said for the production of the unified collective subject, especially in conditions of totalitarianism, where as Zizek tells us, the subject consists only of an id and a super-ego—the self-identical "I" having been eliminated by a process of interpellation uninterested in producing individuated "human beings."

In the extinction-as-teleology argument, one side of the genocidal equation is clearly delineated. The Aboriginal tribes of Tasmania are the collective non-subject of what Clive Turnbull calls in the subtitle to his book an extermination. That the diversity of language, custom and territorial alignments that distinguished the different peoples of Tasmania gets glossed over by such a move is the necessary corollary of a narrative which purports to tell the story of the demise of an entire civilisation. It is less clear, however, exactly who constitutes the unified agent of this extermination. Ostensibly, of course, it is the European colonisers, but we all know that this particular collective noun designates a multiplicity of people from different classes, of different legal status, genders, occupational groups and so on. What is intriguing is that the authors of the historical accounts in question also take ample account of this heterogeneity in their description of individual incidents of violent altercation. It is only when their narratives shift into the interpretive mode that the collective subject is invoked. As Bonwick writes in a particularly overwrought passage:

> We Europeans came upon them as evil dragons, blasting them with the breath of our presence. We broke up their home circles, the only real unit of their society. We arrested them at their corroborees, which in turn were considered evil and taken from them. Even in this one facet of their lives we destroyed their community as much as possible . . . We, the Europeans, turned their song into weeping, and their mirth into sadness. (1870, pp 57–58)

or Turnbull, in his opening assay:

> Not, perhaps before has a race of men been utterly destroyed within seventy five years. This is the story of a race which was so destroyed, that of the aborigines of Tasmania—destroyed not only by a different manner of life but by the ill-will of the usurpers of the race's land. When that ill will was active it found expression in brutality. When passive it deplored extermination while condoning, and participating in the rewards of a system which made extermination inevitable . . . with no defences but cunning and the most primitive weapons, the natives were no match for the sophisticated individualists of knife and gun. So perished a whole people. (1965, p 1)

How then might one approach the decimation of the indigenous peoples of Tasmania as a genocide without invoking the extinctionist position or ascribing a genocidal motive to an imaginary collective subject? Is there a way to work

through the relationship between the agency and intentions of the state and the motives and actions of its subjects that will enable one to situate the actual instances of mortality in a context of disjunction and connection?

## Mortality reports

The first multiple Aboriginal homicide in Tasmania took place at Risdon Cove, on the 3rd of May, 1804. Henry Reynolds describes the "Risdon Massacre" in *Fate of a Free People*:

> A large body of Aboriginal men, women and children moved down toward the infant settlement near the waterfront at Risdon Cove ... They were probably on a hunting expedition. Assuming a hostile intent, the detachment of soldiers stationed there fired their cannon— with what effect it is impossible to determine ... Four people who were on the Derwent at the time gave accounts of the affair to the Aborigines' committee in 1830. Edward White, who was an eye-witness, said there were "a great many of the Natives slaughtered and wounded." James Kelly and Robert Knopwood were on the opposite side of the river but would have heard accounts of the affair. Kelly thought forty or fifty fell; Knopwood said only five or six were killed. Robert Evans knew some died but didn't know how many. (1995, p 77)

This first incident was a killing at the hands of the military but was not carried out with the imprimatur of either Bowen or Collins, the two top-ranking administrators. Bowen was away reconnoitring potential sites for land grants at the time of the altercation; Collins was based across the river in Hobart, and the military post was left under the control of Lieutenant William Moore, whom Turnbull suggests was probably drunk on the day of the incident (1965, p 34). Collins in fact was less than pleased with the turn of events, although it is difficult to tell whether this dissatisfaction was founded in a fear of retribution on the part of the Aborigines, or in a genuine concern for the lives that had been taken. Certainly there are some grounds for assuming the latter. Collins espoused a conciliatory approach to the "problem" of interracial relations in the colonies, but, as Reynolds writes, also "embodied the confusion of British Policy" in this regard (1995, p 88). In January 1805, he issued a general order asserting the rights of the Aborigines under British Law, but then proceeded to implement policies that led to some of the most callous and inhumane mistreatments of the indigenous inhabitants on record. The serious food shortages which beset the colony in the years immediately following its establishment led Collins to allow the convicts under his supervision to forage for themselves in the island's hinterland. Many of these men subsequently estranged themselves from the official settlement and remained in the bush long after the worst of the famine had passed, hunting wild game and stealing provisions and livestock from other Europeans as their means of subsistence.

In a comparable situation to these "bushrangers" were the isolated stock-keepers, the Bass Strait sealers and the whaling communities. These populations existed in a social space only tangentially linked to the official settlements, and were often either oblivious to the formal policies regulating interaction with the

Aborigines, or were disinclined to an observance of the directives asserted therein. The depredations wrought on the indigenous population by this rather amorphous group must be treated as distinct from official but unplanned killings like the "Risdon Massacre." These were crimes even by the standards of the day: rape, mutilation, kidnapping, torture and murder. They were not the sanctioned killings of the military and the judiciary, even if their impact on the Aboriginal population was, at the risk of stating the obvious, hardly dissimilar. And yet, no European was ever brought to trial, let alone convicted, for such deeds. Quite obviously, the apportioning of blame in such circumstances is extremely problematic. Should the administrations of Collins, Davey, Sorell and Arthur have been held responsible for failing to enforce their policies of conciliation? Should the land-owning elite have exercised more control over the practices of their assigned servants and stock-keepers? Could one impute genocidal motives from these "sins of omission," or must the liability for these atrocities rest with the marginal and marginalised subjects directly responsible for their enactment?

In "An antipodean genocide: the origins of the genocidal moment in the colonisation of Australia," A. Dirk Moses borrows from Sartre in suggesting that the agency/structure distinction provides us with a way out of this dilemma. A liberal humanist mode of historical inquiry that searches only for individual agential responsibility for the genocide will, as Reynolds shows so clearly in *An Indelible Stain*, ultimately run up against the absence of a specific order to commit genocide. At the structural level, however, this lack of intentionality sits in uneasy combination with the objective facts that the race history of the Tasmanian Aborigines was horrifically shortened by the arrival of the Europeans. If not for this colonisation, and in spite of claims made by Rhys Jones that the Palawa were suffering from an inevitable strangulation of culture, the Aboriginal inhabitants of Van Deimen's Land would have gone on living as they had done for an indefinite period. No one can be directly blamed for the destruction of the indigenous civilisation and yet that destruction definitely occurred. By looking at the history structurally one can escape the pressure to identify conscious motivation on the part of governmental agencies in Britain or in Tasmania. If one combines this overarching viewpoint with a consideration of the multiplicity of genocides that took place in Tasmania, remembering that the tribes that inhabited the island were only rarely in contact with one another and represented quite distinct nations with different languages and tribal customs, one surely has no option other than to accept that, at some level, genocide did take place in Tasmania, even if that genocide bears little resemblance to incidents like the Holocaust. If nothing else, the rhetorical synonymity that holds between Holocaust and genocide, the significatory compression that makes all reference to genocide proceed by way of the Shoah, brings the two events together.

What separates them of course is their apparent epochal incommensurability. The "factories of death," as one scholar has called the concentration camps of the Third Reich, were, as Zygmunt Bauman has shown us, paradigmatically modern. The decimation and displacement of the Palawa on the other hand took

place at a time when muskets were still in vogue, agrarian labour was the dominant mode of production and colonial democracy was still a far away dream. As will be argued below, however, the colonisation of Tasmania and the replacement of indigenous with European civilisations that took place in its wake also marked a moment of modernisation, of transformation and re-invention that is made doubly modern by virtue of the fact that it was the result of a social logic that typified European modernity even more so perhaps than industrialisation and democratisation: that is, colonisation.

In *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Bauman asserts that the defining characteristics of a genocidal connection are deliberateness and non-reciprocity. These two dynamics played a significant part in the trajectory taken by the demographic disaster. The complicating factor is that they were rarely co-present. Before the Black War began in earnest in 1824, there was neither an official plan to exterminate the Aborigines, nor an ambivalence to which this intention could be imputed. Rather, there was an overt policy of conciliation and protection. This did not save the Aborigines from losses, however, and during this period, violence was rarely reciprocated and certainly not effectively. From 1824 onwards, however, a number of factors coalesced to create grounds for a reading of the extermination as deliberate, the declaration of Marshall Law in 1828 and the Black Line of 1830 being chief amongst them. At this time, however, reciprocity was regained by the Aborigines. The question that needs to be asked in regard to the post 1824 interactions relates to whether or not war and genocide are mutually exclusive terms. The overt strategy of Reynolds and Ryan is to recognise the agency of the Aboriginal Tasmanians that had been glossed over by the extinctionist histories. Can we continue to take account of this autonomy while calling the larger historical logic of which its enunciations form an important part a genocide?

In *Fate of a Free People*, Henry Reynolds follows Brian Plomley in asserting that the character of indigenous and non-indigenous relations in Tasmania underwent a sea-change from 1824 onward (1995, p 29). Up to this point, an uneasy detente punctuated by sporadic clashes had been the norm and between 1803 and 1824 only five Europeans were killed by the Aborigines, while 100 to 150 indigenous Tasmanians were murdered by the colonisers (1995, pp 77–83). White aggression had met with neither organised nor generalised retaliation and the Aborigines were regarded widely as a timid race, far less threatening than the bushrangers who terrorised the colony until the late 1820s (1995, p 29). *In Modernity and the Holocaust*, Bauman argues that a genocide entails a suspension of reciprocity. In war, either party can lose lives, but a genocide means certain death only to the passive victims of the atrocities. Over the course of the seven years from 1824, relations between the indigenous and non-indigenous inhabitants of Tasmania took on the unmistakeable form of military conflict. In the events that ensued both sides suffered substantial casualties, casualties that seem to put the interaction at odds with the common characterisation of genocide as hopelessly one sided. The Aboriginal Tasmanians engaged in a guerrilla war with the European interlopers that consisted of some 706 instances of violent altercation and resulted in about 170 non-indigenous deaths.

But war was only one means by which the Aborigines died. In *Friendly Mission*, Plomley nominates another six different means by which the indigenous inhabitants met their doom. On the one hand there are non-military murders like the Cape Grim massacre of 1827 and on the other hand non-violent deaths that resulted from other factors. The combination of pressure on food supplies, kidnapping, exchange and rape of women and disease was responsible for by far the larger part of the 4,000 odd deaths that occurred in the early colonial period. It is these casualties, neither administered by soldiers, nor ordered by colonial officials that in the final analysis constitute the structural genocide of the Tasmanian Aborigines. Genocide as a term was coined by Raphael Lemkin and the United Nations (UN) in 1948. It was put into circulation in the very specific context of the Holocaust and was designed to provide UN bureaucrats with a means for identifying the criminal act of intentionally killing in whole or in part the members of a particular national, ethnic, religious or racial grouping. It was not designed as a semantic term to cover all the events that might be described through its use, but only to make possible the bringing to justice of those modern individuals who were responsible for a very specific modality of its enactment. If the UN had the capacity to retrospectively try and convict individuals or groups for genocidal actions, perhaps its definition would have placed less emphasis on intentionality and made room for the wide range of indigenocides that have occurred since the bloody history of colonisation began in South America all those years ago. If, as Reynolds points out, genocide was designed to designate an ancient practice in its modern manifestation, then a UN organisation with more than just the Holocaust on their minds might have re-worded their convention to more properly encompass the range of events that so demand inclusion beneath its aegis.

## Genocide as modernisation

The most important contribution that Chakrabarty makes to the theorisation of modernity in *Provincialising Europe* is to show how incommensurable phenomena plucked from apparently diverse epochs can still hold together in a configuration of modernity. The chief focus of Chakrabarty's intervention is the concept of political modernity, of self-rule, enlightenment principles of social organisation, constitutional freedoms, the splitting of private and public worlds, the complex notion of liberal bourgeois humanist subjectivity. The kind of modernity to be discovered in early colonial Tasmania was quite clearly not of this variety. But what Chakrabarty allows one to do is divorce different logics of modernisation from some overarching teleology and read off their enunciations in a fractured and fragmentary way. The denial of Aboriginal agency implicit in the genocidal logic of Tasmania's "discovery" serves as an instance of the issuing of a notice of postponement to non-modern subjects from European modernisers. The Aboriginal inhabitants of Tasmania were found to be incapable of looking after themselves: they needed commandants, conciliators, administrators to usher them into the epoch of the modern. Their traditional pre-modern, ahistorical existence was found to be anathema to a culture that could only understand civilisation as the

transformation of nature into recognisable forms like fields and towns. The Europeans brought modernity to Tasmania in the form of a linearity of time marked off at its far end by the moment of extinction. As Chakrabarty writes:

> Historicism—and even the modern, European idea of history—one might say, came to non-European peoples as somebody's way of saying "not yet" to somebody else. (2000, p 8)

The logic of genocide of course makes this "not yet" a response to the more macabre question of "do we have free run of the island" rather than some "progressivist" query about the indigenous inhabitants' capacity to look after themselves. On the one hand then the invasion of Tasmania and the establishment of European settlements marked the inauguration of a modernity in so far as certain nineteenth century technologies were brought to the island, in so far as the whole project of penal colonisation was based around enlightenment tracts written by British jurists, and in so far as industrialisation, that pre-eminent modern institutional form, was the driving force for the increased crime rates in Britain that in turn prompted the introduction of transportation. The fact that the USA was suddenly unavailable as a convict destination was also the result of a peculiarly modern struggle for independence and self-rule. On the other hand, British life in early Van Diemen's Land was decidedly pre-modern. Hunting and gathering, for instance, were deployed as a means of survival; democracy was non-existent, and future thinking was almost always confined to vain longings for return to the homeland. Van Diemen's Land was not colonised with an optimistic orientation to the future like the US of the founding fathers. It was a prison, a place to forget, not to model new forms of social organisation. In an ironic *volte-face*, the new world was always to be behind the times, somehow older because less amenable to change than the old world from which it grew.

If the modernity of the early nineteenth century was to be witnessed in the bustling streets of London and Paris, the arcades and consumer capitalism documented by Walter Benjamin, the amazing procession of new social types and endeavours that prompted Baudelaire's famous formulation that "the modern is the contingent, the fleeting, the fugitive, the half of art whose other half is permanent and unchanging," then the chastened, fragile collection of huts at Risdon Cove and later Sullivan's Cove must have seemed a long way behind the game. Modernisation of Van Diemen's Land then took the form of development of various kinds, pastoral, manufacturing, civil, that turned the colony into a self-supporting location. The labour of convicts, the work of the free-settlers, the birth of new native-born subjects contributed to the building of a community that was a kind of becoming-modern. Genocide fits into this logic of modernisation then because it was partly the result of pastoral expansion in the midlands and elsewhere. On this formulation genocide enabled the European invaders to become modern, to trade and export wheat that would deliver a certain level of prosperity. In a more macabre sense, on the other hand, the genocide represented the modernisation of the Aboriginal population rather than the European one. The attempts made by people like George Augustus Robinson in his capacity as founder of the encampment on Bruny Island in 1829 that was designed to christianise the

natives, provide them with access to English language learning and wean them off the hunter–gatherer mode of economics and onto an agrarian agricultural one were conscious efforts to modernise intractably pre-modern peoples. The later establishments at Flinder's Island and Oyster Cove repeated these intentions and became the scene of blatantly insensitive modernising gestures like the changing of Aboriginal names to European equivalents and the training of female subjects as domestic assistants. In some sense genocide was a by-product of modernisation. The indigenes died of disease and interruptions in fertility functioning that resulted from incidental encounters with the European interlopers, but the keenness of the administrators to move the Aborigines out of the areas suitable for pastoral expansion cannot be separated out from this larger diorama of mortality. Chakrabarty points out in *Provincialising Europe* that all non-European modernities are inscribed with a lack at their advent. Because they come after and are measured against originary European forms, they cannot be anything other than imitational and replicative. However, just as apparently incongruous inconsistencies like the absence of an interiorised private self as documented by confessional autobiography, for instance, make Indian modernity at once non-modern and other, the conjunction of traditional Aboriginal lifestyles and modernising Western ones in the nascent colony of Van Diemen's Land demarcate a social condition that is different to European forms but remains as steadfastly modern.

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