

## **The Māori Presence in Victoria, Australia, 1830–1900:**

### A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF AUSTRALIAN SOURCES



This essay explores the presence of Māori in colonial Victoria, suggesting that they were significant figures in shaping understandings of cultural difference within the colony. It reassembles a scattered and fragmentary documentary record in order to recover a history that has been neglected and largely forgotten. In exploring a sequence of encounters between Aboriginal peoples and Māori, as well as recovering the history of Māori on the goldfields of Victoria, we enrich the scholarship on the history of indigenous mobility and add depth to historical understanding of encounters between indigenous peoples. We show, more generally, that Māori occupied a prominent place in colonial discourses on race and culture, which frequently drew strong oppositions between Aboriginal peoples and Māori. The temporal focus of this paper is the period 1830–1900 and whilst the spatial focus is centred on Victoria (known as the Port Phillip District of New South Wales until separation in 1851), a preliminary discussion about earlier Māori travellers in New South Wales is offered to place these later travellers within a longer history of Māori travels to the Australian colonies.

As a set of ideas and practices, ‘race’ was inherently comparative as it delineated differences and similarities to differentiate between human communities. Of course, such comparisons were frequently drawn in order to articulate and justify hierarchies, including the forms of inequality that so often underwrote colonial power. Following on a tradition in late eighteenth-century New South Wales of comparing native races, particularly Māori and the American Indian with Australian Aboriginal people, there was much discussion by nineteenth-century colonial writers about the differences and similarities between ‘native races’.<sup>1</sup> The history of these racial discourses has been discussed at length by Ramsden, Palmer, Allen and Geddes.<sup>2</sup> Research by Pybus on convicts and colonists of African descent in the early colonization of Australia resulted in significant alterations to our understanding of the racial mix of Australia and revealed that ‘colonial race relations were more complex than the Aboriginal/White divide which has been tacitly assumed by colonial historians’.<sup>3</sup> This discussion shall extend Pybus’ seminal work by allowing space for the stories of Māori in colonial Victoria and adding to our understanding of how Aboriginal people in Victoria viewed immigrant

indigenous peoples. It shall also follow Byrnes' exhortation to 'participate in transnational and internationalized historical understandings where we do not entirely abandon the local or the national'<sup>4</sup> and add to Paterson's investigation of encounters involving indigenous peoples in Australia and 'how some of the participants may have thought about these meetings'.<sup>5</sup>

### **Māori in New South Wales**

A growing body of research into what has been described as the Māori 'diaspora' to Australia has revealed that New Zealand Māori have been settling in Australia and other parts of the world for over two centuries.<sup>6</sup> Binney's pathbreaking essay on Māori in Norfolk Island,<sup>7</sup> Salmond's seminal work *Between Worlds*,<sup>8</sup> and recent work by Harman<sup>9</sup> and Smith<sup>10</sup> have demonstrated that Māori and Aboriginal mobility was far more extensive during the colonial period than has previously been acknowledged – and that this 'trans-indigenous' exchange between Māori and Australian Aboriginal people was far more complex than histories that imagine indigenous peoples as fundamentally local and place-bound allow.<sup>11</sup> Newspaper reports and government decrees in the early years of the nineteenth century clearly demonstrate a considerable number of Māori (and Pacific Islanders) entering into Sydney, and also show that small numbers of Māori closely examined both the British colonizers and Aboriginal people of New South Wales. Some measure of the volume of Māori and other Pacific Islander peoples arriving in New South Wales during 1805 can be gleaned from the issuing of Colonial Government 'General orders' restricting the removal of Māori and other Pacific Islanders:

Whereas a number of Otaheitans and Sandwich Islanders have been brought from Otaheite and several New Zealanders being brought here and left by South Sea Whalers from the East Coast of that Island; and it being intended by the Persons who have hitherto been allowed to frequent the Islands in Bass's Straits to send some of these credulous people to that place, where their Treatment and Return are very suspicious and doubtful; and in being of the utmost consequence to the interest and safety of Europeans frequenting those Seas, and more particularly the South Sea Whalers, that these people should suffer no ill Treatment, but on the contrary, experience every kindness until they can return to their native country: It is therefore hereby strictly forbid sending any Otaheitan, Sandwich Islander or New Zealander from this Settlement to any Island or other part of this Coast, on any Sealing or other Voyage; or to any place to the Eastward of Cape Horn. All Masters of Ships, Foreign as well as English are hereby forbid taking away any such Otaheitan, Sandwich Islander or New Zealander from hence without the Governor's permission in writing; which will not be given unless with a certainty of the Masters taking them to the Islands they belong to.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover in 1805–1806 several articles appeared in the New South Wales Advertiser which briefly described Māori contact with both Aboriginal

material culture ('Spear fight, attitude of Maori chief to weapons used') and colonial European material culture: 'On Tuesday last Tip-pa-hee, the New Zealand Chief, with his sons, went by water to Parramatta on a visit to Mr. McArthur by whom they were very hospitably received. They testified the greatest astonishment, on viewing the various objects when shown them, and more particularly the cloth and woollen manufactory. Having passed three days in a manner highly gratifying, they returned to Government House on Friday.'<sup>13</sup>

Such encounters and engagements were enabled by empire, which in many cases significantly recast the range and shape of indigenous movement. Ballantyne has noted in the context of cross-cultural contact how colonization reshaped established Māori patterns of movement and slowly created a new circuitry on the land and along the coasts of New Zealand. He further added that 'although many images of "traditional" Maori society stress its deeply grounded nature as identity was tied to specific awa, maunga and rohe, in fact movement was a key aspect of the lifeways of whanau, hapu and iwi before Cook's arrival. Whanau and sometimes hapu and iwi did travel long distances: people travelled to visit kin, to harvest and exchange particular foodstuffs, and to wage war.'<sup>14</sup> Ballantyne argues that the intrusion of imperial agents from 1769 and the formal colonization in 1840 were powerful forces that helped reorganize patterns of movement and the dynamics of community formation in the Māori world. The period between the mid-1810s and 1840 witnessed intensification and stretching of Māori mobility, which meant that eastern Australia became a significant part of the Māori world. For Māori, Poihakena (Port Jackson) was particularly important as it was a valued source of new technologies and trade goods, as well as being the seat of powerful political figures who welcomed rangatira and the home of Samuel Marsden, who worked closely with rangatira in establishing the Church Missionary Society mission to New Zealand in 1814. Similarly it is also possible to trace the reorganized patterns of Aboriginal movement in nineteenth-century Australia. Cahir has noted the significant numbers of Aboriginal migrants and travellers from across mainland Australia and Tasmania who were attracted to the goldfields of Victoria, some of whom formed communities with resident Aboriginal communities.<sup>15</sup> There is also an emerging literature of Aboriginal people who travelled to and formed communities in New Zealand<sup>16</sup> and in California.<sup>17</sup>

Such was the Māori prowess in seafaring skills that speculation about Māori voyagers to Australia before British colonization in 1770 was raised in 1929 upon 'discovery at Dark Point, New South Wales, of a Polynesian adze-blade'.<sup>18</sup> This theory was weakened somewhat by Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal oral histories which clearly indicated a great deal of transnational kinship contacts between Aboriginal and Māori were extant in the early colonial period at Port Stephens and Newcastle, New South Wales. Published oral accounts dating back to 1929 relate how ‘in 1858 a party of Maoris came to West Maitland from Newcastle and gave a tangi at her [Mrs Maher, “a daughter of a Maori father and a full-blooded aboriginal mother”] sister’s funeral’ and that ‘there is a rumour that a whaler was wrecked north of Port Stephens and nine Maori sailors settled there with the aboriginals’.<sup>19</sup>

According to a report in *Maori News* it is possible that a significant number of Māori entering Australia may have been ‘slaves’ in the Bay of Islands who were fleeing a life of captivity, mirroring the way escaped Australian convicts often made for New Zealand.<sup>20</sup> Many are known to have arrived as crew on whaling and trading ships, and thus colonists and Aboriginal people in nineteenth-century Victoria had many opportunities to have direct contact with Māori people.<sup>21</sup> Research by Picker has demonstrated how Māori in the early nineteenth century noted the ‘testimony of our own countrymen who have visited Port Jackson — and Hobart Town’<sup>22</sup> and reiterates how they were no strangers to colonial Australia, convicts and transportation, or English society: some travelled widely within the ‘Pacific world’. Picker emphasizes that the trading and communication links between Australia and New Zealand were extensive. In 1832, for example, some 35 voyages were made between New Zealand ports and Sydney — and these connections grew as settlement in New Zealand increased in the early 1840s.<sup>23</sup> Other scholars have noted the various modes and patterns of movement into Australia by Māori. Diamond, for example, observed how Māori and Pacific Islanders comprised a significant percentage of the crews of whalers and traders who visited Australia, as well as other ports throughout Australasia and the Pacific,<sup>24</sup> and Orange has revealed that many of the skiffs that raced in Hobart Harbour during the late 1830s were crewed by professional Māori crews.<sup>25</sup> Other Māori, Picker opines, travelled to Australia and England either to be educated at the Church Missionary Society’s Schools, out of a simple desire to travel, or to negotiate directly with the Imperial government.<sup>26</sup> Archival traces such as New South Wales births records (1788–1828) include a few Māori children,<sup>27</sup> and school records of the Native Institution in Parramatta which ‘catered for both Maori & Aboriginal pupils’ testify to the presence of Māori in New South Wales commencing from the early 1800s.<sup>28</sup>

### **Early Māori Visitors in South-eastern Australia**

Whilst the official British colonization of Victoria occurred in June 1835, there are brief references to Māori and other immigrant Aboriginal people

being involved in the extensive sealing and whaling industry which operated in southern Australian waters (including Victoria) from 1800 to the late 1840s. For example, Murray noted that amongst the crew of an American sealing ship which frequented Victorian sites was a ‘Native of Sandwich Island’ and also that there was an ‘extensive use of Maori labor on sealing vessels’.<sup>29</sup> At Eden and Twofold Bay (New South Wales) in July 1844, G.A. Robinson, the Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Port Phillip District (1838–1849), met ‘Otahite Bill’, a whaler from Tahiti who was living at Eden with a Tinnorer mittung woman (from Victoria).<sup>30</sup> Otehite Bay at Eden was named after him.

Encounters between Australian Aboriginal people and Māori in this early period of contact (1800–1835) are likely to have been violent, reflecting the underlying dynamics of sealing, a often exploitative form of imperial extraction. Official reports in this period vividly describe sealers kidnapping and enslaving coastal Aboriginal clans along the south-eastern seaboard.<sup>31</sup> By way of example, the Surveyor at Swan River [Perth] stated that ‘there were 4 Port Phillip [now Victoria] natives, 3 women and a boy at St Georges Sound [Albany, Western Australia] who were stole away by the sealers in the year 1834. They were stole by the Captain of the George, the fourth cutter, which left Sydney touched at Western Port on its way to St Georges Sound.’<sup>32</sup> The composition of two sealing crews, as described by Major Lockyer at King George’s Sound in 1827, included immigrant Aboriginal people from both Tasmania and Victoria: ‘In one boat were four white men, an Australian aboriginal male, and Mooney, a native woman, of Van Diemen’s Land [Tasmania]; in the other four whites and two native women, one from the mainland of Australia, the other Dinah; from Van Diemen’s Land.’ Lockyer further noted: ‘Occasionally we find Maoris among the crews, and often times natives from the vicinity of Sydney.’<sup>33</sup> Meston’s study of ‘the halfcastes of the Furneaux Group’ confirms both the cosmopolitan nature of the sealing industry in the Bass Strait during the opening years of the nineteenth century – including ‘Hindoos’, Māori women, Tahitian men and women – and the sexual enslavement of Aboriginal women.<sup>34</sup> Oral history accounts of violent sexual abuse and enslaving of Aboriginal women by whalers and sealers in southern Australia corroborate the archival accounts. Tilbrook’s Nyungar family history data revealed that children were sometimes born from forced sexual unions with the crews of whaling boats frequenting the south-west coast of Western Australia, who were recruited from many different countries including Europe, America, New Zealand, South East Asia, the Pacific Islands and Africa. Tilbrook was informed:

One day several Aboriginal girls and women were fishing on sandbanks in the Esperance Bay area. Their return to shore was hindered by a party of strange men, probably whalers or sealers, until the tide came in, cutting them off from the shore and making them virtual prisoners. The girls and women were then ambushed by these men, who kept them as workers and sexual partners while they were in the area. One of these women subsequently gave birth to a baby girl, whom she named Lucy. Lucy grew up to marry Bill Kipping (or Rippen) and had a family of three girls and one boy.<sup>35</sup>

Tilbrook's research clearly indicates that sexual relationships between whalers and sealers and Nyungar people were not uncommon. Listed in the family trees compiled by Tilbrook are several families which are the result of sexual unions between Aboriginal women and immigrant indigenous whalers, such as 'Mallane, a west African or American whaler with an unidentified Aboriginal woman from Busselton' and 'Jack Hansen, son of Maori whaler from the Vasse and an Aboriginal woman'.<sup>36</sup> Tilbrook also notes that the intermarriage of Islander (possibly Māori) women brought to Australia and Nyungar Aboriginal men occurred:

Throughout the early and mid-nineteenth century there were several accounts of women being captured by sailors, usually sealers and whalers, and taken far from their homelands. One of these is of a group of five women who were brought to Fremantle in the late 1860s. It is thought that they were originally from an island in the Pacific Ocean, as they all had very straight noses and their dusky skin had a reddish, or coppery, undertone. The women were left in Fremantle to make their own way in a strange land. One, Kitty Yoong or Young, lived with a European, Jack Farrell, for a time. Later, she met and married Jack Mindemarra and had a large family. It is not known what became of the four other women, although their story continues to be passed on.<sup>37</sup>

The whaling vessels operating in Victorian waters, which frequently had Māori within their crews, were equally known to have regularly had violent encounters with Victorian Aboriginal coastal clans' people. This fact was attested to by Joseph Wedge, an early colonist at Melbourne who personally investigated the shooting and abducting of six Aboriginal women and children. Wedge reported to the Colonial Government that numerous 'flagrant outrages' had been committed upon 'Aborigines at Portland Bay and other whaling stations' over a period of several years.<sup>38</sup> This section has marshalled some fragmentary evidence to suggest that within the context of whaling and sealing, Māori encounters with Aboriginal peoples were likely to have been violent.

**'Contrasting the Native of New Zealand with the Aborigine of Australia'**  
Standfield has noted how the comparing of Australian Aboriginal people with Indigenes from other parts of the world, especially Māori, was a common

feature of nineteenth-century colonial writers discussing the Antipodes.<sup>39</sup> The comparison was almost always a negative one. Picker observed that ‘Maori were seen throughout Australasia and by interested Britons as a people who could be moulded in their image: childlike, they could be brought up as either responsible citizens or as disreputable individuals’, whereas Australian Aborigines were universally viewed in a lesser light.<sup>40</sup> The prevailing view in the nineteenth century of Māori as equivalent to Anglo workers and Aboriginal as inferior led, according to Ramsden, to a situation where ‘on several occasions, in the early part of last [nineteenth] century, when labour was at a premium in New South Wales (despite a large convict population), it was suggested that Maoris should be brought from New Zealand to work in this country’.<sup>41</sup>

David Kennedy, a Scottish singer who travelled to Australia and New Zealand with his family in the 1870s, made plain his view: ‘During our whole stay in Auckland we could not help contrasting the native of New Zealand with the aboriginal of Australia. The Australian black is an uncouth fellow, a loafer round country hotels, a grinning plaything for passing strangers, a kind of human tree soon to be rooted out. But the New Zealand savage is by far superior, physically and mentally, to the Australian aboriginal.’<sup>42</sup> Edwin Middleton, a newly arrived immigrant to the colony of Victoria in the 1850s, is also an exemplar of this comparative racial viewpoint: ‘They [Australian Aboriginal people] certainly do not possess the intelligence of the Moirie [Māori] of New Zealand, who with proper treatment might be brought to a high state of civilization.’<sup>43</sup>

Middleton and many of his contemporaries, especially during the Victorian gold-mining rushes of the 1850s and 1860s, emphasized in letters back home and the pamphlets produced to inform would-be gold miners in England that the goldfields were a meeting place of all nations. Clark and Cahir,<sup>44</sup> and more recently Cahir,<sup>45</sup> have illustrated how frequently miners remarked on the mixed assemblages of mining parties, such as William Rayment, who noted in his diary that whilst at Buninyong in central Victoria he was ‘working a claim with some Calcutta darkies’.<sup>46</sup> Others such as J.F. Hughes, who struck out for the central Victorian gold diggings in 1853, were more expansive. He exclaimed: ‘Porcupine Flat had now rapidly developed into a gigantic rush of some 40,000 people. Among those busy gold-seekers might have been found representatives of nearly every phase of human society – from the Aboriginal, the ticket-of-leave man from the Derwent, the stockman from the Riverina to the enterprising merchant and the Oxford graduate.’<sup>47</sup> This pell-mell of human society was relatively free of discord, according to some, such as William Nawton, a miner on the central Victorian

goldfields in September 1852: ‘You have of course every grade of character amongst the diggers – from the most courteous gentleman to the commonest black – but all seem to harmonize with each other.’<sup>48</sup> An anonymous writer at the Mt Alexander diggings in central Victoria echoed Nawton’s observation: ‘Where all have much the same aspect and association is necessary for work, while no guarantee of character can be obtained, groupings are formed, not of the most pleasant description to some of the parties. That of a gentleman, two convicts, a black native, and a Zomerzetzire boor, may be taken as a sample.’<sup>49</sup>

### **Māori Presence on the Victorian Gold Fields**

Typically historians have paid limited attention to the involvement of indigenous peoples in the history of gold rushes and gold-mining. Yet there is significant evidence that demonstrates that various indigenous groups were engaged with the opportunities that gold presented. For example John Singleton, a surgeon on the Victorian goldfields and staunch advocate for the establishment of the Aboriginal Station at Framlingham in western Victoria in the 1860s, wrote explicitly of his close associations with people of all nations on the Victorian goldfields during the 1850s, stating that ‘men of almost every European and Asiatic nation and language were here’, including ‘Greeks and Germans, Danes, Swedes, French, Spanish, Portugese and Italians, Hindoos, Negroes, Malays, Chinese, with Maoris, and other Pacific Islanders’.<sup>50</sup> Singleton, an evangelical Christian, set up a bible class which was attended by ‘a Negro, an Armenian from Persia, a native of St Helena, a Tahitian, some Irishmen, Englishmen, Scotchmen, and Chinamen, and ere long ... twelve or fourteen Maoris, Samoans and Sandwich Islanders’ and subsequently held Christian services ‘in the Maori language’.<sup>51</sup> Cahir has been able to demonstrate how Victorian Aboriginal people were an active and very visible presence on the same Victorian goldfields as those where Māori and other indigenous peoples participated.<sup>52</sup> Whilst Cahir and Clark<sup>53</sup> have been able to reconstruct some semblance of how Victorian Aboriginal people viewed Chinese people on the goldfields, it has thus far not been possible to locate similar documents which would provide clear insights into what Paterson termed ‘notions of shared non-whiteness’ between Victorian Aboriginal and Māori.<sup>54</sup>

There is strong evidence that the majority of Māori miners on the Victorian goldfields were predominately from whaling vessel crews who, like the majority of vessel crews in this period, sought better returns from their labour on the goldfields than from returning to their ships. W.E. Adcock’s observations confirm that their assembly on the goldfields of central Victoria



did not go unnoticed: ‘One of the sights at Eaglehawk in its secondary stage was the operations of Throckmorton, a New Zealander, who had more than 15 Maoris working for him, most of whom had been sailors upon whaling vessels. He found rich washdirt on the Bendigo side of Eaglehawk Gully, and shrewdly calculated that it was a waste of time and money to wash it up as it was raised, cradling being a slow process. He therefore started his men stacking it, and they raised several great mounds of washdirt ... and realised a considerable fortune in a few weeks.’<sup>55</sup>

Māori miners are occasionally noted to have been independent miners as well. Local historian A.M. Pearson, in his history of Omeo, recounted that ‘Herotia Manning, a Maori, discovered the Polar Star [reef] a short distance away, and this again was rich’.<sup>56</sup> Robert Thomas, a miner near Malmsbury in central Victoria, reported the great wealth a party of Māori had gained: ‘half way up [the gully] was what was called the Blackman’s hole being a claim occupied by new Zealanders whose faces were tattooed; this claim was considered the richest in the whole gully and they were supposed to have made out of it a thousand or fifteen hundred pounds each’.<sup>57</sup> In the Gippsland region R.B. Smyth<sup>58</sup> noted that in the early 1860s in the Woods Point district there was a creek named ‘Maori Creek’ and the *Illustrated Australian News* published an engraving entitled ‘Gaffney’s Creek, All Nations mining claim at Wood’s Point, Maori Creek, 1881’.<sup>59</sup> The very close associations of small parties of Māori and other non-indigenous miners were also reflected in many miners’ recollections and personal diaries. Ned Peters, a miner on the Dunolly fields in 1856, averred the Māori presence on a couple of occasions: ‘Walter has a young New Zealand chief, he is quite an intelligent person, a native of Poverty Bay ... Harry the Maurie [Māori] and his mates have just got a nugget 13 lbs weight this morning’.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, in discussing gold-mining in the McCallums Creek–Craigie district near Maryborough, James Flett comments on how a miner named John Barr in August 1855 was working a rich little gully that ran into Eaglehawk: ‘The gully was worked by 6 Maoris and the chief invited Barr to go back to New Zealand with him, all land and women thrown in’.<sup>61</sup> George Dunderdale, a miner on the Bendigo and adjoining fields also noted their ‘exotic’ looks and preponderance in some gullies:

Once I went to a rush of Maoris, near Job’s Gully, and Scott came along with his portfolio, a small pick, pan and shovel. He did not dig any, but got the ugliest Maori he could find to sit on a pile of dirt while he took his portrait and sketched the tattoos. That spoiled the rush; every man, black and white, crowded around Scott while he was at work with his pencil, and then every single savage shook hands with him, and made signs to have his tattoos taken, they were so proud of their ugliness. They were all naked to the waist.<sup>62</sup>

In the early 1850s, J.G. Smith, a gold miner at Ballarat, noted that a man and ‘a Maori woman [Meta] came to Slatey Creek’ and settled into gold-mining and the community. Meta’s friendliness, her traditional singing and her distinctive tattoos made her popular and ‘esteemed’ within the mining community.<sup>63</sup>

The Māori presence was very significant on some goldfields, with Bendigo being the locale for some hundreds. Discussing the Bendigo fields, Cusack noted: ‘Enmity generated over succeeding months was not an antipathy towards the non-European digger per se. There had been Chinese diggers on the fields since 1851, as well as other non-European groups – Negroes, Maoris and Malays – who continued to find acceptance as part of goldfields society. Primarily, it was a question of numbers. By the end of 1854 they possibly outnumbered the European diggers. They had no need to adapt to the mores of the digging scene. A community within a community, they were socially and culturally self-sufficient.’<sup>64</sup>

The Djadjawurrung Aboriginal people belonging to the headwaters of the Loddon, Avoca and Richardson rivers of Central Victoria were also very prominent on goldfields surrounding the Bendigo region, frequently appearing in miners’ correspondence and artwork,<sup>65</sup> and would have inevitably encountered Māori diggers. Unfortunately the Djadjawurrung’s response to these mainmait (foreigners) has not survived in the historical records, but the numerous references to them by non-indigenous miners attest to their very noticeable presence. George Mackay related their conspicuous presence at the Red Ribbon agitation (a precursor to the Eureka rebellion): ‘At that time there were numbers of native New Zealanders at work in Bendigo, and when the agitation was at its height some hundred and fifty of these armed themselves with pistols, guns, etc., and marching to the residence of the police magistrate, volunteered to place themselves under his orders in maintaining the peace of the district. They camped outside of his residence for a night and a day, but their services fortunately were not required for the preservation of order.’<sup>66</sup> Mackay’s account is corroborated to a very large degree by both Hubert De Castella’s rendering of the event and that of Panton, the Police magistrate. The only differences are the number of Māori said to be present (60 in number, according to Panton) and the possible influence their show of solidarity to the Government had on the miners’ rebellion:

The 300 Maoris who were at Bendigo were camped together and busy like other miners looking for gold. Mr. Panton never went past without saying a few kind words to their chief. When he received news of the Ballarat insurrection he called him in to make him promise to keep the New Zealanders calm if any disorder broke out. An hour later the chief arrived in front of the government camp with all the men of his tribe. There he lined them up in battle order and gave a

speech, after which they uttered frenzied shouts to proclaim their attachment to the government and all joined in one of their fierce war songs ... Who knows if the demonstration of these island chiefs did not help discourage the few Red republicans at Bendigo, who were detested by the peace-loving miners?<sup>67</sup>

Ramsden alerts us to a poorly researched topic, of how colonial powers considered the use of indigenous peoples against each other: ‘It may not be generally known that in the sixties of last century the suggestion was put forward in all seriousness that aborigines should be brought from Australia to fight the so called “rebels” of Waikato and Taranaki. The Australian natives, it was suggested, would be invaluable as fighters in the bush country. Fortunately, nothing came of the suggestion.’<sup>68</sup>

### **The ‘Exotic’ Māori**

The framing of Māori as exotic is also evident in the illustrated books (Figure 1) and classified advertisements of this period. An advertisement in the Melbourne newspaper *The Argus* announced to ‘Curiosity Collectors and Gentlemen Connoisseurs’ the sale of ‘Maori War Implements, Canoe, and A Superb Collection of Fiji Island Implements’.<sup>69</sup> More than 20 years later, references to the Māori presence in Victoria appeared in *The Argus* (24 December 1888) advertising an ‘Engagement Extraordinary of the Troupe of Maoris (Male and female, 22 in number) Who have been selected to represent New Zealand at the Paris Exhibition, and who will appear in their FULL WAR COSTUME And dance their National and War Dances’.<sup>70</sup> The daily performances given by a Māori troupe at the Friendly Societies Gardens in Richmond, an inner suburb of Melbourne, were billed immodestly as the ‘GREATEST ATTRACTION EVER OFFERED to the PUBLIC OF VICTORIA’. Interestingly, Broome<sup>71</sup> and Cahir and Clark<sup>72</sup> have chronicled how entrepreneurs, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, capitalized on the ‘otherness’ of Victorian Aboriginal culture and performed touristic corroborees in theatres and other public venues during the nineteenth century.

The otherness of a Māori performance from a Victorian Aboriginal (unidentified language group) perspective was observed by one colonist, who noted how Māori ceremony was amusing for them – and subsequently emulated by Victorian Aboriginal people. It is very likely that Māori songs and dances were then exchanged and traded with Aboriginal peoples across large swathes of Australia. Research by White<sup>73</sup>, McDonald<sup>74</sup> and Cahir and Clark<sup>75</sup> has confirmed that in the colonial period there was a rapid and extensive memorialization of foreign songs and dances into Aboriginal ritual performance. The colonial writer also averred that the large numbers of

Māori in New South Wales (Port Phillip was a district of New South Wales until 1851) during the early period of colonization (1830s) ensured there were frequent meetings between Aboriginal and Māori:

The natives generally speaking, are on good terms with their own personal appearance. A few rather laughable instances have occurred, on their meeting with Africans brought by some family to the colony. They lose no time, however, in making known their opinion of the black fellow who has no hair; and from the number of New Zealanders now employed in New South Wales they have frequent opportunities of meeting them. The New Zealander in dancing or singing distorts his features very much, suiting the action to the words sung; this affords much amusement to the aborigines, who in their own way attempt a travesty of it afterwards.<sup>76</sup>

Early statistical records, shipping records and even a hotel name such as South Melbourne's 'Maori Chief Hotel' (*Argus*, 16 June 1892), possibly commemorating the Māori who lived there, indicate that the ports and seaside suburbs of Melbourne were a focal point for the Māori in Victoria in the nineteenth century. Other references to Māori in Victoria indicate a less ephemeral presence. The *Maori News* noted, for instance, 'There were apparently groups of Maori living in fishing camps along the shore of the Mornington Peninsula near Melbourne in the latter part of the nineteenth century.'<sup>77</sup> Local history research by O'Toole confirms that Māori were indeed long-time residents in coastal regions near Melbourne and reveals that Māori were commemorated in the Mornington region by way of a place name: 'A native water well was known as the "Maori" well because, it is said, it was used by a group of Māori who camped there.' These Māori are also enshrined in the communities social memory, and are construed as an exotic and colourful entry in the region's history: 'An eye witness described the Maori who are said to have camped in Sandringham as mentioned, as having been about twenty in number, men, women and children. The men wore only trousers which were cut short below the knees, and the women only skirts which were worn almost to their ankles. They spoke little English, earned their living by selling shellfish, had flat-bottomed boats and a lot of fierce dogs. They left the district about 1896.'<sup>78</sup> It is noteworthy that the social memories of Māori in the region are disjointed, considering the length of time they are reputed to have remained in the district (over 50 years), and the way Māori are perceived to have outlived the 'other' Aboriginal people in the region – the Boonwurrung people – is also revealing of postcolonial racial views:

Anyone who delves into the history of the Peninsula comes upon vague references to Maori. However, no one can give any precise information about them. They are supposed to have formed camps all along the foreshore, to have been fishermen, and to have worked in the lime kilns, somewhere in the period between 1840 and 1900. They are said to have been shipwrecked

sailors, and in support of this theory there is at least one reference to the Maori manning the sealing [sic] ships which, in the early days, sometimes came from New Zealand to hunt seals in Bass Strait. But one would not have expected them to have women and children on board.

It is on record that in the 1860s [sic] a troupe of Maori entertainers was brought to Victoria, but because of financial difficulties the company disbanded. Somehow they found their way to Rosebud, where they became fishermen, remaining there for perhaps two years, until kinsmen in New Zealand sent them money enabling them to return home.

Nevertheless, this does not account for Maori and their families in Beaumaris as late as 1896. It is possible that, because of the original presence of these people in the Peninsula, it became habitual among an earlier generation of local inhabitants to call any people of darker skin, such as Gypsies, half-castes, and some others, Maori. The Aborigines had, of course, disappeared by this time.<sup>79</sup>

Whilst Paterson's important study has drawn our attention to multiple Māori perceptions of Queensland Aboriginal people and Indians at the commencement of the twentieth century,<sup>80</sup> it has only been possible to locate one brief source which provides Victorian Aboriginal responses to Māori. It is unfortunate that it we have been unable to locate any accounts which indicate Māori perceptions of Victorian Aboriginal people. References to Aboriginal perceptions of other immigrant indigenous people in colonial Victoria, however, whilst not numerous, are extant. Clark and Cahir, in their discussion about Aboriginal perceptions of Europeans in nineteenth-century Western Victoria, have closely examined how Aboriginal people in most parts of Australia understood the arrival of Europeans and how they recognized Europeans as *ngamadjidj* (or an equivalent word), meaning deceased clan members who had returned to life. The belief in transmigration or reincarnation was widespread in Australia during the early years of European colonization.<sup>81</sup> Aboriginal perceptions of immigrant indigenous peoples remain poorly understood. Jenkins, for example, informed his readers in a travelogue publication, which spanned the years 1838–1842, that Aboriginal people considered other black-skinned people who were not indigenous to Australia as reincarnated Aboriginal people who had misbehaved in their previous life. Jenkins claimed that Aboriginal people did not have a 'definite idea concerning a future state of rewards and punishments. After death, they suppose the spirit, or *good-de-mit*, is conveyed through the bosom of the ocean to some distant land, in which it then takes up its residence. As he is obliged to pass through so much water, the deceased person, as they suppose, is washed white: hence they deem the whites the returned spirits of their ancestors and friends. The Malays and Lascars are also regarded as returned spirits, but on account of their bad conduct they have been left black.'<sup>82</sup> However, no accounts to date have been found in the historical data which

corroborate Jenkins' statement. The archival records from colonial Victoria clearly reveal that small numbers of immigrant indigenous peoples were present in the colony from the commencement of colonization in 1835 but the recorded perceptions of Victorian Aboriginal peoples towards immigrant or unknown Aboriginal peoples do not match up with that recorded by Jenkins. Several instances of dark-coloured or immigrant Aboriginal people being killed by resident Aboriginal clans were known by George Augustus Robinson (Chief Protector of Aborigines). It was explained to Robinson and other writers that there was an enmity towards foreign indigenous peoples, and that they were perceived as *mainmait* (foreigners) and could be legally put to death according to their customs. One such incident was reported by Robinson in 1845. Robinson noted how an 'Indian coolie [was] murdered by natives in the Upper Goulburn in accordance with superstition to appease the names of their relatives'.<sup>83</sup> He also recorded Victorian Aboriginal reactions to 'coolies', African-Americans, Islanders, Chinese and Europeans of dark complexion. Almost without exception Robinson's journals reveal an enmity by Victorian Aboriginal people to what they considered to be immigrant Aboriginal people. Pybus has noted similar occurrences of African people in other parts of colonial Australia being viewed by Aboriginal people as hostile and alien, and cautions that in 'evaluating the impact of African diaspora it is not helpful to collapse these settlers into the same category as the Aborigines. Africans are best viewed as part of, not apart from, the wider colonial society.'<sup>84</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In this exploratory article it has been shown that there were numerous reports of non-Australian indigenous peoples, including Māori, forming communities in Victoria during the nineteenth century, particularly during the gold-mining period (1850–1890). Pybus has revealed that there were multiple pathways from Africa to colonial Australia, and noted that she was astounded by the scale of immigrant Africans to Australia: 'research on Afro-Black convicts in Australia turned out to be just the tip of the iceberg. In the last six months I have located over 1000 convicts and free settlers from the African diaspora.'<sup>85</sup> There is strong evidence which confirms that the multiple pathways which Pybus discussed in relation to the origins of African immigrants to Australia, whether they were escaped slaves, convicts or free settlers, may be strikingly similar to the arrival of the Māori diaspora in colonial Victoria.

We have been able to locate only one Victorian Aboriginal voice about Māori and have been unable to locate any Māori voices about Victorian Aboriginal people, which is somewhat surprising given the relative surfeit

of Victorian Aboriginal voices about other immigrant Aboriginal people and other immigrant indigenous peoples. In terms of traditional Aboriginal cosmologies, the Māori should have been identified as mainmait or some equivalent word meaning ‘no good’, ‘foreigners’, ‘wild men’, and as such were vulnerable to being killed by residential Aboriginal clans.

Aboriginal people were initially exposed to Māori through sealing, whaling and maritime trade, and the little evidence that does exist suggests this interaction would have been violent. With the advent of the gold rushes in Victoria in the 1850s many of the Māori whaling crews joined the rushes and their presence was significant at fields such as Bendigo, Eaglehawk, Omeo and Dunolly. A limited number of place names attesting to a Māori presence in colonial Victoria has also been documented – such as Maori Creek in the Woods Point district and Maori Well at Sandringham. This article has contributed to a more explicitly transnational approach to our understanding of Māori history in the colonial period. Māori were highly mobile individuals within the empire and this essay suggests that there is real value in understanding nineteenth-century Aboriginal Victoria as a frontier of the Māori world, even if the histories of encounters between indigenous peoples remain difficult to recover.

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