Living An Immoral Life—‘Coloured’
Women and the Paternalistic State

There are vast populations in northern Australia who refer to themselves as ‘coloured.’ The inclusive category, ‘coloured,’ was ubiquitous in official and vernacular vocabularies until Indigenous Australians were released from the paternalistic grip of Aboriginal administration. The category was not legislatively defined, and might include Asians, Pacific Islanders and Indigenous Australian descendants. Its very usefulness was and continues to be that it defied all legal classifications such as alien/non-alien, Indigenous/non-Indigenous, Asian/non-Asian. Since access to citizenship for Indigenous Australians has been linked to identity—an identity that previously debarred them from citizenship—it has become difficult to remain ‘coloured,’ and many of these families are beset by intense conflicts over identity, and uncertainty whether their forebears were or were not considered Aboriginal people and what impact this may have on their access to citizenship rights. The uncertainty arises not only from a legacy of massive displacements and unreliable records, but also because the legislative boundaries drawn around Indigenous Australians have been extremely fluid.

For the patriarchal state, whose universe clearly defines the role of women in the maintenance of family, class and race, coloured women are an essentially intractable, morally suspicious phenomenon, an administrative and ethical problem. This ‘problem’ quickly moved to the core of Aboriginal administration in north Queensland. The challenge that coloured women posed to a white Australia during the first half of this century is intricately linked to predominant attitudes towards Asians, so that Aboriginal policy cannot be understood in isolation, as a black-and-white issue.

A considerable measure of xenophobia guided the policies of this bureaucracy, particularly xenophobia directed at Asians. The first comprehensive Aboriginal Protection Act in Queensland (the Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897) was a clear expression of anti-Chinese sentiments; its major target of intervention was the supply of charcoal opium to Aborigines by Chinese. As a matter of policy (not of legislation), Asian-Aboriginal children were specially targeted for removal as neglected children (using the provisions of the 1884 Reformatory Schools Act), and the discussions surrounding the introduction of the 1897 Act were very much focussed on the experience of far north...
Queensland, where the marine industries, conducted almost exclusively by Asian and other coloured men, were subject to particular government attention.  

The interaction of Asian men with Indigenous Australian women was always suspicious and considered tendentially immoral, not least since Asian men were seen as such. Since (to discourage the formation of coloured families in Australia) very few Asian, Pacific and other 'coloured' women were permitted entry, those who were in Queensland were either suspected of engaging in, or were the offspring of what were considered 'pernicious associations'—sexual relations across racial boundaries. Coloured women, therefore, threatened the race/class distinctions between black and white. Their legal existence was in the interstices between protective legislation extended over Indigenous Australians, and restrictive legislation extended over aliens, particularly Asians. The histories of Australian-born coloured women have fallen victim to this xenophobia because their records are evocations of immoral lives.

By 1901, significant advances had been made in Aboriginal administration by means of an impressively efficient network of reporting through ten local Protectors, powers to remove Aboriginal persons to missions and reserves, and supervision of employment by means of a permit (refused to Chinese, again as a matter of policy until this became law in 1901). The Southern Protector, Archibald Meston, confidently projected the date at which Aborigines would be extinct to be in the 1950s, but the Northern Protector, Dr Walter Roth, was concerned about the increase in the 'half-caste' population. At his instigation, the 1897 Act was amended to furnish further powers over interracial unions to the Protector of Aborigines. Much of the inspiration for this amendment again came from the marine industries of the far north, and a close reading of the discussions surrounding this amending legislation reveals that the bureaucracy was not merely concerned about mixed descendants generally, but quite specifically about 'coloured half-castes.'

Pernicious Associations and Moral Rectitude
In January of 1901, Roth brought the increase of marriages between Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal men to the special attention of the Home Department, urging that 'some check should be placed' on this development, with the parenthesised specification 'especially in the case of Asians and Kanakas.' While the amendment bill was being debated in parliament (July to October 1901), Roth commented several times on 'the evils to which the promiscuous marriage of Aboriginal women with coloured aliens may lead' and on 'the frequency of marriages which have been solemnised of late between Kanakas and Aboriginal women.' He felt certain that 'the new Aboriginals Amending Act will however easily cope with the evil.'

Roth's opinion was highly esteemed by the Home Secretary to whom he was responsible. His various reports were also the authoritative source around which the parliamentary debate was structured. The amendment bill was very much Roth's bill, the Southern Protector complaining that he had not been consulted.

Roth suggested that all ministers of religion and others appointed to celebrate marriages should be instructed not to sanction any unions between Aboriginal women and coloured aliens without seeking his advice. Despite a caution from the Registrar General's Office that this proposal was unworkable, a circular memo was sent complying with Roth's request concerning 'marriages between Aboriginal women and men of other races' urging ministers and marrying Justices to 'use every endeavour to prevent the marriage ceremony becoming the harbour of refuge for those men who (under the Aboriginal Protection Act 1897) are deemed unfit to employ natives.' The reference to Asians was not explicit in these instructions, but well understood.

During the debate of the amendment bill, strong concerns were expressed about the wide powers it bestowed on Protectors. The honourable gentlemen were concerned about the balance of power between the bureaucracy and white employers. However, the Home Secretary assured them the bill was framed with a view to Asian men:

The reason why legislation is asked for is that an Asiatic, who is known to have been convicted of offences against the Act—for supplying blacks with opium, for instance—upon a prosecution being attempted against him for a breach of the Act with regard to harbouring a gin and her family, perhaps [sic] portion of that family being his own children, does this: He goes through a form of marriage with that gin, and defies the law. There are many such instances. He is a nomad, and that marriage bond is no more to him than a snap of the finger. If he wants to sever it he packs up his traps and goes elsewhere. But he is able, by going through that form of marriage, to defy the Protector, and say 'You cannot remove this woman from my premises; she is my wife' these men are absolutely unfit to be entrusted with the care
of aboriginals. ... The permission referred to in the Bill would never be refused in the case of any man who desired to marry an aboriginal or half-caste woman, provided he was a respectable man and was not suspected of supplying opium to aboriginals or of some other offence against the law with regard to aboriginals. 11

An attempt to pass such a bill had failed in 1899. It had included a provision to bar all Asians from employing Aborigines, and the Japanese government had lodged a formal protest against this discriminatory provision. There was much support for inserting a similar clause in the 1901 amendment in order to bar, if possible, all Asians from employing Aborigines. Various members toyed with this amendment seeking to also exclude Melanesians, Polynesians and Africans, but this was strenuously opposed by the Home Secretary who feared royal assent would be withheld as a result. After much debate, both the upper and lower houses settled upon excluding Chinese only — with a permit to employ an aboriginal or half-caste shall not be granted to any alien of the Chinese race — because, it was mentioned, China was on its knees and would not lodge a protest. 12

Giving evidence before the Legislative Council, Roth pointed out that the clause barring Chinese from employing Aborigines had been inserted in the legislative assembly, and did not follow his advice. Possibly anticipating this problem, and aware that such a clause might jeopardise the bill, he had supplied a special report on this question, with reference to the Atherton scrub, arguing that Chinese could be better employers than whites:

The Chinese offer better wages, and, what is more, pay the aboriginals their wages when due; they also house and feed them well. I cannot instruct the local Protector to prevent Chinese employing them (as was urged by the Atherton Progress Association some two and a half years ago). 13

This does not mean that Roth viewed Asian employers favourably, only that he was politically astute. He stated:

Personally I am averse to the Chinaman employing them unless they are reputable, but in some places my hands are forced to allow them on account of Chinese offering better wages and conditions. 14

To strengthen his argument for the amendment bill, it appears that Roth made special inquiries among regional Protectors about Aboriginal women living with coloured men, and he forwarded the response received from Mossman as a 'further illustration of the evils which the promiscuous marriage of Aboriginal women with coloured aliens has led to.' The label 'promiscuous' is interesting, since the Mossman report refers to couples living in sanctioned matrimony:

There are nine aboriginal women living in this district at present who, or of whom, all hold a marriage certificate as most of them went through a form of marriage with the Kanakas in the English and Methodist churches here about last January ... Some of these married gins are almost constantly working about the Hotels in the township and appear to be able to procure for themselves and the Kanakas a goodly supply of spirituous liquor. 15

After the amendment bill was passed, Roth was vested with the powers to authorise mixed marriages, 16 and the policy was to disallow marriages with coloured men. To a request by a Japanese resident of Thursday Island to marry a girl from Murray Island, the Chief Protector replied that 'such marriages are much deprecated and it is not considered advisable to allow Japanese to inter-marry with aboriginals. 17 Local Protectors and missionaries shared the Chief Protector's views that associations with coloured men were especially pernicious. 18

With the 1901 amendment the Aboriginal Protection bureaucracy set itself up quite explicitly as a moral arbiter. Having the power to sanction mixed marriages, it came under a barrage of requests for permission to marry and made it its task to decide in each case whether a marriage was morally desirable. Ros Kidd has characterised the ethic of this bureaucracy, which gradually transformed itself into a fully-fledged Department, as a 'medical/moral policing rationale.' 19

Moral rectitude as a guide for action is clearly reflected in the annotations which appear in the Removals Register as justification for removals. Next to those referring to destitution and disease the recurring annotations were 'frequenting Chinese dens,' 'loafer,' 'quarrelsome,' 'drunkard,' 'immoral.' The relatively large number of case files where written objections were raised to removals (leading to cases being discussed in greater detail), demonstrate that these were convenient labels to trigger and justify intervention and did not normally need to be further substantiated.

Moreover, judgements about the morality of Indigenous Australians did not need to be made on a case-by-case basis. In 1915, 159 persons were removed in one sweep from Hull River with the explanation 'loafer class, are a hindrance and annoyance to better class of Aboriginals.' One must wonder how many were left behind to whom these 159 might have been an annoyance. Administrative convenience presents itself as a much more credible explanation for this mass...
removal at a time when a new reserve was being established in the area. A random perusal of the Removals Register, which is far from comprehensive, shows that in 1935 a group of 23 was removed from Turn-Off Lagoon (near Burketown, where there were known to be a number of Chinese gardeners) to Mornington Island, on the grounds of 'immoral associations.' Association with Asians was often a sufficient expression of immorality to warrant removal.

To compound the difficulties for the paternalistic state which sought to maintain a clear distinction between white and black, or desirable and protected populations, the growth of the ‘coloured’ population in the north challenged such distinctions. The emergence of this ‘coloured’ population owed much to the marine industries centred on Broome in Western Australia, Darwin in the Northern Territory, and Thursday Island in Queensland.

The Protection Act of 1897 made provision for ‘half-castes’ as well as Aborigines, and by ‘half-castes’ were meant the offspring of an Aboriginal mother and other than an Aboriginal father.30 By the 1920s, the mixed population no longer conformed to this definition, and administrative labels were devised to gain a leverage on the emerging coloured populations. The notion of ‘quadroons’ (and ‘octroons’—carrying one-eighth Aboriginal blood), emerged as an administrative category. This category was tested over the case of a young woman, Atima Abwang who twice served as a testcase for the powers of Protectors over the coloured population of Thursday Island. This young woman became so trapped in bureaucratic machinery that it is possible to trace the extension of departmental powers through the personal story of Atima and her family, a family which was a phenomenon of the pearl-shell industry in the north.

A Dynamic Industry and the Response of the State

From the 1880s to the turn of the century, the Torres Strait was at the edge of international opportunity, fired by a growing and modern industry which used diving apparatus to access depths of the sea never seen before. This industry used all its colonial connections both to assemble teams of fit and daring young men from Asia and the Pacific to staff the diving boats, and also to sell the mother-of-pearl raised by them on the Continent and in the United States, and to market bêche-de-mer into Asia.

The emergence of this industry in Torres Strait was swift. The more or less accidental, but certainly spectacular discovery of precious pearl-shell at Warrior Island in 1870 by Pacific trading connections transformed the Torres Strait and brought it into the keen ambit of government and traders. By 1879, Pacific trading companies from Australia, Britain and Germany were running 109 vessels in that year, Queensland responded to this new income-earning activity by extending its jurisdiction over the whole Torres Strait. The government outpost established at Albany Island in 1862 had been shifted to Somerset (March 1863) and then to Thursday Island (1876-77) in an attempt to move closer to the industry, and Queensland had extended its jurisdiction to 60 miles from Cape York in 1872 to regulate the industry. The London Missionary Society established an outpost in Torres Strait in 1871, and both it and the traders brought thousands of Melanesians and Polynesians into Torres Strait. Well entrenched in the Pacific, the traders grafted onto their blackbirding connections to supply labour to the pearl-shell stations.

The trade in Pacific Island labour came under national and international criticism from the anti-slavery movement, and some measure of protection was afforded to Pacific Islanders through the Pacific Islanders Protection Act of 1872 (an imperial act, referred to as the Kidnapping Act), and through Queensland’s own Pacific Islanders Protection Act of 1880 (which, however, exempted the marine industries). Possibly as a result of this, Asians started to be imported as workers through Singapore and Hong Kong during the 1880s. One of these Asians was Ahwang, or Ahwang Dai, a Dayak (c 1860-1935), the son of a boatbuilder in the Singapore Straits settlement. In 1891 he married Annie (c. 1873-1956) a girl from Badu Island.31

The Emergence of Legal Distinctions

At the time when Annie married Ahwang, legislative distinctions between Torres Strait Islanders (Annie’s mother), Pacific Islanders (Annie’s father), and Malays (classed as Asians) resident in Queensland were only just emerging, just as the genetic and cultural differences between them were becoming blurred. By 1908 an estimated 200 out of 230 residents of Darnley Island were South Sea Islanders and their descendants. All Torres Strait Islanders were legally Pacific Islanders (‘not under the influence of any civilised power’) until 1872, and those north of 10th degree latitude were so classed until 1879. The first legal distinction was made between Australian Indigenes and other Pacific Islanders with the introduction of the Native Labourers’ Protection Act 1884 which regulated the employment of Indigenes of Australia and Papua in the marine industries. When the 1897 Aborigines Protection Act was introduced, Torres Strait Islanders were exempted from its...
provisions until 1904.  

When Annie Ahwang’s first three children were born, between 1891 and 1895, whether one were a native of Torres Strait, or of the Pacific, or of the Singapore Strait Settlement, made little difference to one’s status vis-à-vis the state. As British subjects, Malays were able to lease land and become naturalised. When she was pregnant with Atima in 1898 and another three babies by 1904, they may have had some news about the new legislation affecting Australian Indigenes; the mainland, however, was far away, and life at Badu—where ‘Sandalwood-English,’ a Kriol developed through the Pacific trade, was the means of communication across a cosmopolitan population poised at the edge of modernisation—was recognisably different from the life of camp Aborigines.

In 1904 a new government resident and a new Protector of Aborigines were appointed at Thursday Island, and both agreed that all Australian Indigenes, including those of Torres Strait, were to be protected by the new bureaucracy, and their employment and wages supervised and regulated. All settled Torres Strait Islands were declared reserves. Torres Strait Islanders were to be brought under the Act, and there was to be no further distinction between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. This meant that part-Torres Strait descendants of Malays, Pacific Islanders and others were to be classified as ‘half-caste’ if they were either married to, or habitually lived or associated with Aborigines (including Torres Strait Islanders).

Like many others who felt threatened by this new policy, Ahwang promptly gathered up his now substantial family of nine children, and moved to Thursday Island at some time in 1904 or 1905, so that it could not be said that his children (and perhaps his wife) ‘habitually associated,’ as well as to protect them from the ‘half-caste’ label and the intrusion of the state:

That’s why my father brought the children from Badu. They left from Badu to TF. You had to be certain miles away so you don’t come under the Act. Badu was in the limits. My father had to take the children to Thursday Island. But we not supposed to be under the Act, my father come from a different country. Shouldn’t be under the Act.

A Coloured Population

Thursday Island, commercial centre of Torres Strait and the pearling industry, was intended to be a white administrative settlement. Natives were prohibited from staying overnight, and Asians were...
accommodated in special guest-houses. (Except during lay-up season, crews usually stayed on the luggers.)

The supposed white predominance was, however, always under siege. By the 1890s, the shops were mainly owned by Asians including Japanese, Chinese, and Singhalese; there was a Malay-town, and a ‘Jap-town’ with boarding houses, a public bath, stores and brothel. The Japanese had become deeply entrenched in the pearling industry, owning most of the boatships and building all the boats. In 1894 the Japanese population of over 700 at Thursday Island outnumbered the Europeans. In 1897 they numbered double the European population which was further dwarfed by considerable numbers of other Asian residents.

Queensland enacted its own Asian immigration restrictions before the federal White Australia policy was implemented. However, the pearl-shell industry remained exempted from the provisions of the federal immigration restriction Act to enable the further importation of Asians under indenture contracts, though they were barred from ownership of boats, businesses, or land, and from naturalisation. Thursday Island continued to be decidedly un-British and non-white in atmosphere and population: ‘You don’t wear trousers, you wear sarong all the time. And tabi, Japanese boot.’

While people on Thursday Island (as in Broome and Darwin) generally coped very well with their multi-ethnic surrounds, such developments were viewed with suspicion further south. Hansard records the following vitriol from the member for Clermont who felt that:

The presence of coloured aliens on Thursday Island was a distinct menace to the white population, not only of the island but of Australia generally. Queensland had long been recognised as the open door through which were permitted to enter not only this State but eventually the whole of Australia hundreds of thousands of coloured persons coming from the east, bringing with them their barbarous systems, the curious codes of morals which were peculiar to those peoples, and making of Thursday Island a regular little Chinese, Cingalese, or Japanese principality. The presence of those persons was undoubtedly a danger to the people of Australia who at the federal elections had declared emphatically for a white Australia. The island, he maintained, should be peopled by white races.

As in the other pearling centres, a cosmopolitan population emerged at Thursday Island in addition to the ‘coloured aliens’ which was neither strictly Asian, nor strictly Indigenous, nor ‘white’ enough to escape comment—which, in fact, defied all description except ‘coloured’ ‘Coloured’ became a semi-official category for non-white Australians who were not necessarily subject to any particular set of legislation (such as that aimed at Asiatic aliens, Indigenous Australians, Pacific Islanders, etc.). Australian-born coloured people could enjoy full formal citizenship, but the label itself sidestepped all such legal distinctions. Being coloured was what united families and neighbourhoods across the various legal ascriptions it was possible to have. A Thursday Island census of 1914 counted 1650 coloured men (including those engaged in the pearling fleets), and 137 coloured women. Having close family links into Indigenous families, into Asian families, and yet mostly unfettered by restrictive and protective legislation, this population was an administrative problem.

The Ahmat family at Thursday Island was part of this growing population. Local Protectors of Aborigines had a special brief to supervise Indigenous and ‘half-caste’ women and children, with a view to presiding over moral rectitude according to British legal and spiritual tradition. They were often faced with requests by ‘half-caste’ women to marry Asian men and knew that such marriages with non-British, non-Christian men did not always concur with British legal and Christian moral principles. Having placed itself in the position to adjudicate over such marriages, the bureaucracy needed frequently to ponder whether these ought to be sanctioned.

Permission to Marry

In March 1914, the Thursday Island Protector of Aborigines, government resident and police magistrate, William Lee-Bryce, was faced with a request for permission for the marriage of an Asian and a 16-year old Asian-Aboriginal woman, Saya. The woman was expecting a child, and her father strongly approved of the marriage. The young woman stated that ‘she was promised to him long ago.’ The promise-system of marriage was recognised by Australian Aborigines (the girl’s mother), Filipinos (the girl’s father), Muslim Indians (the prospective spouse according to oral history) and Malays (the prospective spouse according to Lee-Bryce). It was not recognised by the British legal tradition of the nineteenth century—although it had been practiced in Britain in earlier centuries. The family, steeped in non-British traditions, sought to obtain official sanction for the marriage shortly before the child was born in order to satisfy the requirements of the current British legal-moral universe as well. Lee-Bryce speculated that the
girl’s father ‘probably received some valuable consideration for his consent’ (also a custom widely recognised among the cultures referred to), and could not avoid touching on the subject of her mother’s ‘intemperate habits,’ although the mother had been removed and was not living with the girl. He withheld approval.

The girl was working as a domestic in a white household and the child to which she meanwhile gave birth was from a white man. Although the 1901 Amendment Act gave clear powers to discover the paternity of mixed descendants, the identity of this man was not known or sought by the Department. By the time Lee-Bryce reported on the case, the baby was born; he was, therefore, able to refer to the girl’s ‘immoral habits,’ and recommend that she be removed ‘to a southern settlement for a short period and then hired out to some person who will be strict with her.’

At the same time, he referred to two other cases, which appeared to him to be of a similar nature. One was the Aboriginal (or part-Aboriginal) wife of a Filipino bêche-de-mer fisher who ‘frequently lives for long periods with men engaged in the bêche-de-mer fishery.’ She should be returned to Mapoon with her baby, and her older children sent to the Roman Catholic Priest and Sisters of the Sacred Heart at Thursday Island. suggested the Protector.

The other, apparently similar, case was that of ‘Atima Awong’ (Ahwang), aged 17, ‘the daughter of a Malay and a half-caste Torres Strait Islander’ Lee-Bryce hastened to admit that ‘strictly speaking she does not come under the Aboriginal Act but she and others similarly situated have been treated as being under the control of the Protector.’ Atima was about to marry a Malay engaged by a pearling company when Lee-Bryce informed her and her father that permission was required. Ahwang, evidently in favour of his daughter’s marriage to a compatriate, and keen on steering his family away from the paternalistic infringements of the state, ignored this instruction, and proceeded with a ‘Malay fashion’ wedding. Lee-Bryce speculated: ‘I strongly suspect she has been married “Malay fashion” on more than one occasion.‘

Relying on official documentation, it is difficult to ascertain what a ‘Malay fashion’ marriage was, except that it clearly was not an officially sanctioned wedlock. ‘Malay’ was a term used for the peoples of Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, including the then Dutch East Indies. The wedding was backed by the spouse’s employer, Reg Hocking, a pearling master in Australia and Dutch New Guinea, who was also the Honorary Dutch Consul, and who very likely had had some familiarity with Malay customs. About Lee-Bryce’s familiarity with or tolerance of Malay customs, we can only speculate. Certainly the Chief Protectors in Queensland after Roth were administrators and not ethnographers, and to refer to a ’Malay fashion’ marriage was clearly an expression of disapproval for unsanctioned cohabitation.

Atima and her spouse, now living as man and wife, had undermined the Protector’s authority, and Lee-Bryce sought to put his foot down. The marriage was not to be sanctioned or recognised, and the couple torn apart. Knowing that Atima was not actually within his domain of powers, Lee-Bryce recommended that ‘the Minister will strain the interpretations of the Act and order the removal of Atima to a southern settlement—it will be for the girl’s good and serve as an example to others.’

The entry in the Removals Register, recording the removal of Saya and Atima from Thursday Island to Barambah reads: ‘For their own protection. Living immoral lives.’ Both young women were sent into exile for several years for wanting to marry men who met with the approval of their fathers. The third woman was also removed with her baby for ‘living an immoral life.’ What was the thread of logic that united the intervention into these three women’s lives? One had a child out of wedlock, the second was suspected of prostitution, the third was in a de facto relationship. Summarising the three cases, Lee-Bryce wrote:

Unless some strong stand is taken with girls like Saya and Atima, numerous other cases of similar description will occur: the consent to the marriage would be accepted by the coloured population as a sign of weakness, and immorality would become a lever to procure the necessary permission to marry.

The Protector had no legal powers over this population and sought to affirm his moral authority. Though the key indictments of these women’s morality were merely by way of speculation, the Chief Protector supported Lee-Bryce. The ensuing distortion of protective powers exemplifies the legal existence of coloured people in the interstices of protective legislation at the time.

Saya was permitted to return after three years and married her promised husband, a fishmonger, with whom she proceeded to have eight children. Whereas Saya’s official file ends with her removal, Atima’s file begins there. It contains, apart from a personal love letter from her promised husband, no less than seven pleas for her release—from her employers, from her father, from herself, and from John Douglas, former Premier and former government resident at Thursday Island. All these fell on deaf ears. Together with the
replies to these letters, they unravel the scenario.

Illegal Removal

According to her employer, Atima was a highly regarded and well protected domestic. She had worked for several respected white families of Thursday Island. Her employer, Mrs. Riley wrote:

This girl Atima has been the best servant I have ever had including white and black and during the whole term of service with me I have not one black mark against her. She was industrious, faithful and most trustworthy and why such an extreme action has been taken I fail to see. People here who have employed her such as Mrs KO Mackenzie, Mrs Allan (shipping master) and others are like ourselves very incensed at the action as they all know what an extremely good girl she has been.

Atima lived with her parents, and one of her family waited in the Rileys' kitchen every evening to walk her home. On the afternoon of 16 June 1914, she had taken her employer's children for a walk to her parents' house when two plain-clothes policemen appeared to arrest her, take her to the watchhouse by a back way, keep her locked up all night, and place her the next morning on the ship to Brisbane. She had been given no warning of her arrest, no opportunity to pack a suitcase or to purchase one solitary warm stitch of clothing, consequently she has been freezing ever since she left. (Barambah, now Cherbourg, would have been very chilly in June/July.) Nor were her employers warned of her impending arrest, nor any arrangements made for the children in Atima's charge at the time. When the policemen appeared at her employer's home at 4 pm, they protested against her removal, and promptly telexed the Home Secretary AG Appel before the close of business on the same day, arguing that Atima was under legal agreement until October and that her removal was 'unjustifiable and drastic.' Mr Riley was under the clear impression that the removal order had been signed by Appel.

In response to this pressure, the police were asked to explain the 'drastic action,' and the constable in charge declared that he had only received the Minister's order for Atima's deportation per Changsha on 16 June, a day before the departure of that steamer. Two things are amiss with this explanation. The Changsha was only one of the three monthly steamer services connecting Thursday Island with Hong Kong, Manila, Japan, Singapore and the southern ports of Australia. Transportation to Brisbane could not have been very difficult in almost any week of the year, and so Atima's hurried dispatch seems overly officious. Moreover, the Minister's orders for the removal of Atima and Saya were signed only on 28 September 1914, long after the removals were effected. It is possible, but undocumented, that an order for Atima's removal was issued previously by the Acting Home Secretary AH Barlow on 2 May 1914, as Chief Protector Bleakley later claimed, but it is not clear why in that case a second order had to be retrospectively issued in September.

Being under a legal agreement to an employer should have placed Atima outside the ambit of Protectors' powers for removal according to Section 10a of the 1897 Act (if it were conceded that she was under this Act at all.) To stifle possible embarrassment in the face of the inquiries instigated by Riley, the entire administration, including the Under Secretary of the Home Department, considered that 'the matter can be best adjusted by allowing Mr Riley to engage another girl.' However, the Rileys argued that they had no need for another domestic. They had close links with the Ahwang family and wished Atima to be returned to their service. For several months Mrs Riley refused to employ another domestic. In her correspondence and exchange of parcels with Atima she claimed: 'we still do all our own work and no one to help us.'

Atima became the subject of a personal consultation between the Home Secretary and Chief Protector Bleakley, with the result that the administration rallied behind the local Protector's power contest because: 'the removal of Atima and Saya had a great moral effect, but if they are not detained for a few years my influence with the coloured population will be seriously affected.' This removal was clearly ultra vires, and the bureaucracy was fully aware of this. The Chief Protector informed the Home Department:

From the facts that the girl was a quadroon Malay and legally under agreement at the time she was really exempt from removal, but the Protector apparently acted in the interests of discipline and morality and it is certainly expedient that this action, though perhaps not entirely correct, should be upheld.
Mr Riley was using every influence at his command to secure the object he has in view and if his request is granted my position will be considerably weakened in the eyes of both the white and the coloured population.46 He strongly advised that Atima not be allowed to return. In this entire correspondence no shadow of doubt that might have justified the action taken was cast on Riley’s good character. The ‘object he had in view’ was Atima’s return to her wife’s employment. Riley fell foul of the administration because he challenged the bureaucracy.

Despite all efforts on her behalf, Atima was now fully in the grip of the Act. When she asked for 10 shillings out of her earnings to send to her ailing father, the Brisbane (female) Protector passed on the request to the Chief Protector. He consulted the local Protector at Thursday Island, who considered that ‘the father is not in need and could probably do light work if he cared to.’47 Much doubt was cast on the character of Atima’s father in this correspondence through reference to his gambling habit. He engaged in the very popular Thursday Island pastimes of gee far, ‘luk-luk pat,’ and other games. His fortunes rose and fell and he may, in times of need, have leaned on his children. According to his two surviving sons, he amassed the wealth to buy a house at Thursday Island through gambling, and lost it in the same manner.48 With the removal of Atima, the whole family became subject to the paternalistic rhetoric and unsubstantiated detrimental comments about people’s lifestyles which was the discursive culture of the Department.49

After Lee-Bryce’s death in December 1916, Mrs Riley resumed her lobbying efforts. The acting Protector supported Atima’s release, but Bleakley insisted that she serve out her current contract as a domestic in Toowong, Brisbane. He argued that ‘the girl appears very happy and well looked after in her present place,’ that Mrs Riley was placing unwarranted pressure on her, and that:

Atima informs me she wishes to visit Thursday Island, but only for a holiday, in about six months time, after the wet season, and when she has saved sufficient to pay for her trip.50

Atima’s own letter to the Chief Protector the following month gave the lie to this interpretation:

Dear Mr Bleakley, just a few lines to let you know that I made up my mind to go back to Mrs Riley again when my times up. I think she done her best to get me back since I been away from her place and I like her very much. I was quite happy with her. Also Mrs Cameron. And I think I been here long enough with Mrs Cameron. So I would like to know if you let me go back to Mrs Riley for good. I rote to her and told her that I was going to ask you to let me go back. So I have nothing more to say. Your faithful Atima Ahwang.51

This is likely to be as determined as a 19-year old dared to be with the Chief Protector. Atima returned to Thursday Island after more than three and a half years of exile, but was unable to shake off the shadow of the bureaucracy’s watchful eye over her personal affairs.

A Matter of Definition

At some time in 1919, Atima had a baby and it appears that she came under some pressure to enter into a marriage. In June 1919 and in March 1920, applications were made for this. Both marriages were approved, but neither took place. Atima seemed quite keen now to escape the arm of the Department. In her first application she claimed to have been born on Thursday Island. Submitting this application, the new Protector pondered:

It is questionable whether either of the applicants come under the Aboriginal Act—the former [Atima] having been signed on under the Act for some years I think it better to be on the safe side, and obtain your consent.52

The Department remained ‘on the safe side’ and kept vigil over this woman. In September 1920 the local Protector questioned Atima about her intended marriage; within a few weeks, very likely now tired of this moral persecution, and following her elder brother’s example, she evidently decided to clear her status once and for all, and applied for formal exemption from the Act. Although the Department had always been of the opinion that she was not, ‘strictly speaking,’ under the Act, her application was refused. Subscribing to the ‘safe side’ logic, this was justified as follows:

It does not appear that being under Departmental control inflicts any hardships upon the girl and on the other hand apparently no additional benefit would accrue to her from being exempt from supervision.53

No hardship, indeed. She had been exiled for more than three years, barred from marrying, had her wages banked by the Department, been questioned by officials about her romantic involvements, and been cast as immoral.

Atima’s application for exemption was supported by letters from Walter Filewood, the AWU representative, addressed personally to the Home Secretary McCormack (‘trusting this finds the labour party
a successful term of office'), to Chief Protector Bleakley ('regards to you and your brother Charles'), and to the local member Ryan ('I conduct his election business'). Going over the head of the local Protector was a direct affront to the bureaucracy. The Department responded by proceeding against Filewood, who was having an affair with Atima, for 'harbouring a female half-caste.' However, to be successful, the Department needed first to ascertain that Atima was a 'half-caste' under the Act. This question was settled not in response to Atima's application for exemption, but in order to proceed against Filewood for harbouring.

The current legal definition of 'half-caste' was the offspring of an Aboriginal mother and an other than Aboriginal father (Section 3 of the 1897 Act). However, Section 4 made three further provisions by which 'half-castes' could be considered Aboriginal: if they had been living with an Aboriginal spouse at the passing of the Act (Clause b); if they otherwise habitually associated with Aborigines (Clause c); or if, in the Protector's opinion, their age did not exceed 16 years (Clause d). If it could be argued that Atima's mother, Annie, was not a 'half-caste' but an Aboriginal, then Atima would be a 'half-caste' under the Act. Bleakley referred this question to the Home Secretary, suggesting which decision ought to be reached:

A question has arisen in regard to the position of a crossbreed girl... It is extremely important that the Protector should, if possible, have the power to deal with this case to maintain discipline amongst the numerous crossbreeds under his charge.

The Crown Solicitor was now asked for the first time to consider the status of quadroons under the Act. He determined, and circular No 21/6 was sent to all Protectors stating that:

A female quadroon comes within Section 14 of the A P Acts of 1897 if it can be established that the mother is the offspring of an aboriginal mother and other than an aboriginal father and that she (the mother) otherwise than as wife, habitually lived or associated with aboriginals.

This meant that, according to Section 14, such a female might not be harboured without penalty. However, this did not fully answer the case because of the complicating temporal dimension of the definition. The local Protector now formulated five questions about Atima for consideration by the Crown Law Office.

First, Atima's mother Annie was the daughter of a native of Madagascar and a full-blood native of Badu, and married to a Malay. She lived at Badu Island at the passing of the 1897 Act and until 1904 or 1905, but had not since then habitually lived or associated with Aborigines. Was Annie an Aboriginal within Clause c, Section 4? —It was determined that Annie was Aboriginal from the time of her birth until she left Badu.

The second question problematised the way in which the 1897 Act made provision for people to 'become' Aboriginal and to 'become' 'half-caste.' 'Would Annin Savage Ah Wang remain an aboriginal within the meaning of the Act after she left Badu, or would she automatically become a "half-caste" on ceasing to habitually live or associate with aboriginals?' —The Crown Solicitor considered that upon ceasing to habitually live or associate with Aborigines, Annie ceased to be Aboriginal and became a 'half-caste.'

The third question was whether Annie's offspring born at Badu were 'half-caste.' —This was also answered in the affirmative. Of course, the children could only be considered 'half-caste' on the strength of their mother being deemed Aboriginal. The mother was retrospectively classed as having been an Aborigine until 1905.

The fourth question was whether Section 4 in fact provided a feedback loop for endless generations of mixed descendants to be drawn back into the Act. If the 'half-caste' mother were 'deemed' Aboriginal, could the children also be 'deemed' Aboriginal under the same provisions? The Protector asked:

Would such children be deemed to be aboriginals within the meaning of clause c of section 4, and would they after attaining the age of sixteen years provided they had ceased before attaining that age to habitually live or associate with aboriginals, then come within the definition of half-caste as defined in section 3?

To which the Crown Solicitor replied:

Each of them until in the opinion of a Protector he or she was over sixteen years of age, or until he or she ceased to live or associate habitually with aboriginals, was deemed to be an aboriginal under Section 4. On attaining sixteen, or ceasing so to live or associate, he or she ceased to be deemed an aboriginal, and came within the definition of half-caste.

The Protector also inquired about the status of the last two children born at Thursday Island. —The Crown Solicitor determined that these were neither 'half-caste' nor Aboriginal.

All these determinations depended on Annie having lived on Badu Island which meant that she 'must of necessity have habitually associated with aboriginals.' However, on further inquiry,
Protector Holmes realised that living at Badu did not necessarily mean associating with Aborigines:

When at Badu I inquired fully into the question of Atima Ah Wang and found that she did not at any time, nor did her mother, habitually live or associate with aboriginals. It appears that the girl’s grandmother lived with her husband, a native of Madagascar, at the South Sea Settlement, so that her daughter Anuin Savage, Atima’s mother, did not from the time of her birth or at any time habitually live or associate with aboriginals. Her mother is a half-caste female within the meaning of the Act, so that her children are all exempt from its provisions.60 This should have been the last we heard of this family in the Department’s files. However, it was not. In November 1922 an ambitious young Protector was appointed at Thursday Island, Cornelius O’Leary; twenty years later, he would become Chief Protector for twenty years.

Greater Powers

After only half a year on the island, O’Leary gingerly raised the question of the protection of quadroon females. Atima, having been told by a previous Protector that she was exempt from the Act, evidently disavowed any power of the Department over her. O’Leary felt that this was a bad example and that the Act should be amended to grant him powers to oversee such women:

an outstanding phase of aboriginal life on Thursday Island has been the prevalence of temptation to halfcaste or aboriginal girls, who are domestically employed, to go the wrong road. Opportunities for such unfortunates are no doubt great, and I have come to the definite opinion that the temptation is accentuated by the example of many quadroon females who see fit to lead an unhindered and immoral life. There are some half dozen or so of those persons here, probably more who are the unhappy plaything of all and sundry. Even the survey ship ‘Fantome’ supplies small quotas of men who on their periodical visits here promiscuously associate with these females. This phase of the question is officially no concern of mine in that I have no jurisdiction over these females or interests in their welfare.... Mr. Holmes had one such girl signed on, during his regime, as a halfcaste, which was a good move, but the position has now reacted upon me in that an interested person, her present employer, schooled her to the position with the result that both the parties refused to recognise this office after the expiry of the agreement, and she now preaches her doctrine of defiance and immorality to her associates. I have had, on several occasions, to have female and male aboriginals before me for associating with those avowed immoralists, but while they are permitted to live the loose life, the position is difficult in the extreme.61 A strong stance is taken here but, as far as factual information goes, this report is rather misty. The allegation against Atima is that, with the support of her employer, she refused to recognise any authority of the Protector over her. From everything we read about Atima this position is entirely justified. She appears to have had the consistent support of whites on Thursday Island to defend her against departmental infringements. O’Leary’s conclusion was that she was defiant and immoral, and that both she and the whites advocating for her were ‘avowed immoralists.’ Of the ‘many’ loose women who allegedly characterised Indigenous life at Thursday Island, there were about six known cases, though the Protector did not really wish to count them, since the ‘half a dozen or so’ were instrumental in arguing for an extension of legal powers. The purpose of O’Leary’s report was to recommend an amendment of the Act furnishing Protectors with discretionary powers to bring quadroons under the Act. He suggested that:

The Minister may, on the recommendation of the Chief Protector require any female quadroon otherwise than as wife to state a reason why she should not be brought under Sections 14, 15 and 16 of the principal Act. And on such reason being unsatisfactory the Minister may inform such quadroon that the abovementioned sections are applicable to her.

These sections of the Act referred to harbouring, employing, and the Protector’s supervision of employment of Aborigines and female ‘half-castes’ O’Leary argued that ‘the result of this amendment is apparent; it would allow for stricter surveillance, and furthermore: their mistaken idea that they are of equal intellect to the white would be rudely dispelled. There is no doubt that the average female halfcaste is quite as intelligent as the Thursday Island quadroon whose associates are solely halfcaste quadroon or cosmopolitan.62 O’Leary professed to be unaware whether the question of quadroons had been raised before, and asked to be informed of ‘the
reasons for their sole exemption from the provisions of the act.' The
Chief Protector replied by forwarding a copy of circular 21/6 (the
Crown Solicitor’s opinion formulated in response to Atima’s case),
and regretted that ‘apparently the only hope at present of exercising
official control of such women’ was by means of ‘deeming’ their
mothers Aboriginal.63

Chief Protector Bleakley finally asserted his authority with a
further amendment of the protection Act in 1934 which specifically
targeted, by his own admission, the coloured population of north
Queensland.64 Defining ‘half-castes’ now became a tricky
mathematical exercise in counting parts of ‘blood’ as well as
retaining the social dimension of the earlier definition (habitually
associating). The Department’s powers now extended over all ‘such
women’ who had been considered in the grey area of Aboriginal
administration: ‘the illegitimate children of half-caste mothers, the
children of parents both half-castes, and the crossbreed element
of aboriginal or Pacific Island strain.’65 Section 4 (b) of the new Act
defined ‘half-caste’ as:

(i) Any person being the offspring of parents one of whom is
an aboriginal, or both of whom are half-castes; or
(ii) Any person being the grandchild of grandparents one of
whom is an aboriginal, or both of whom are half-castes, who
lives or associates with aboriginals, or who lives as an
aboriginal, or who in the opinion of the Chief Protector is in
need of the control or protection of this Act; or
(iii) Any person of aboriginal or Pacific Island extraction
who lives or associates with aboriginals, or who lives as an
aboriginal or who in the opinion of the Chief Protector is in
need of the control or protection of this Act.

The age of ‘half-castes’ ‘deemed to be Aboriginal’ under Section 4
d was raised from 16 to 21, and all exemptions from the Act were
initially revoked with the effect of disenfranchisement for all those
who had held exemptions and been able to vote in State elections.

At the zenith of the Department’s powers, a resistance movement
developed, fuelled by the coloured populations. A highly public
campaign at Thursday Island protested against disenfranchisement,
alleging that whites had been turned into blacks. Of 384 registered
voters at Thursday Island in 1936, an estimated 70 to 85 were ‘half-
castes’ (36 of them had been signed on during a massive roll-up in
March and April 1929. evidently anticipating a show-down with the
Department) Closely following the objections raised by the
Coloured People’s Progressive Association, whose spokesmen were
whites married to coloured women, and three men referred to as
‘half-castes’ (T Loban, WH Dubbins, and D Hodges, a returned
soldier), a State Public Service Commissioner’s Inquiry contested the
propriety of the arbitrary powers assumed by the new Amendment
Act (through clauses such as ‘in the opinion of the Protector’).66

All over Queensland, associations were formed demanding
citizenship and, in areas where there were large coloured
populations, strikes were staged against the departmental control of
wages in 1936 and 1937.67 In an attempt to stem the tide of protest
from the far north, the 1897 Act was repealed in 1939 with two
separate pieces of parallel legislation, one for Aborigines and one for
Torres Strait Islanders, which granted some measure of self-
government to the island communities

Conclusions
The ‘medical/moral policing rationale’ of Queensland’s Aboriginal
administration bureaucracy had always prescribed a holistic approach,
taking into its brief the whole range of government services such as
education, health, training, employment, welfare, housing and
infrastructure Having defined the whole Indigenous population as an
administrative problem which had perennially to be solved, the
bureaucracy attempted to formulate a singular and encompassing
vision and to marshal the powers to implement it, though its powers
could never be commensurate with the level of responsibility that the
Department paternalistically sought to take for Indigenous
Australians At Thursday Island, where a significant coloured
population strenuously resisted being drawn under its protection, the
Department’s authority was constantly challenged. Many of the policy
outcomes and the justifications given for them indicate a siege
mentality. The response to this contestation was an ever-widening
ambit of powers for the Department, seeking to contain the blurring
of distinctions between definable populations.

Coloured women, therefore, became a particular target for
departmental concern, and this concern was much wider than merely
with Indigenous populations: the cultural plurality of a multi-ethnic
society was contested and reined in with reference to the morality of
these women. Under the spotlight of administrative reasoning, normal
behaviour became suspect. It was difficult for coloured women to
stay safely outside the Department’s ambit because living with Asians
was practically co-terminous with living immoral lives and requiring
protection.

How much of the impetus for Queensland’s Aboriginal protection
legislation came from the far north has been overlooked in the
The northern impact is evident in the 1897 Act, its 1901 and 1934 amendments, and in the 1939 parallel Acts, and Thursday Island was the administrative training ground for a succession of Chief Protectors who were, therefore, closely familiar with the far north. The north was characterised by the pearling industry with a strong presence of Asians, in a climate of the deepest aversion to them during the emergence and implementation of the White Australia Policy. The concern over the moral conduct of the Australian-born coloured population of mixed Indigenous descendants emanated as if naturally from the xenophobic attitudes towards Asians, many of whom shared with Indigenous Australians the customs of polygyny and promised marriages. Associations between Indigenous women and Asian men, which often followed such customs, were considered pernicious and immoral. The result was that much of the Aboriginal protection legislation was framed with Asians firmly in mind.

During successive administrative periods, 'coloured' was never a neatly encompassed category. Shifting policies, coupled with vast discretionary powers vested in Protectors, cast a long shadow of uncertainty over large populations in the grey areas of the administration’s ambit of powers. In the scramble for defining boundaries, it was possible to be informed that one had been an Aborigine in the past. It was possible for siblings of identical parentage to include Aborigines, 'half-castes' and persons who were neither Indigenous life experiences were tailored to available administrative categories.

This uncertainty impacts on the current identity of many descendants. Many are not sure whether their forebears are to be considered Indigenous Australians or not, and how legitimate their status as Indigenous Australian descendants may be, now that the populations of Thursday Island, Broome and other formerly cosmopolitan townships are bifurcating into ‘black’ and ‘white’ camps. Nor can they be much encouraged to research such personal questions through available documentation. The Department’s moral policing ethic has bequeathed on us a host of incriminating documents containing unsubstantiated allegations against the morality of individuals, telling a story of their ancestors from between the lines of bureaucratic self-justification. What reads as objectionable to a disinterested researcher must be horrifying for the living descendants of people who are thus recorded, and can only serve to widen the gulf of suspicion between black and white

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14 Examination of Walter Roth by the Legislative Council, 8 October 1901, QPP Vol. LXXXVII 1901: 1141.
15. Constable McKenna, Mossman Police Station to CPA, 23 August 1901, QSA A/58764.
16. 1 June 1902, Roth’s request for authorisation under Sect. 9/1901, prepared for Minister’s signature in August 1902 QSA A/58764
17. CPA to (a female at Murray Island) 19 February 1913, QSA A/58767
18. For example, the Normanton Protector reported, with reference to an application for marriage between a Chinese man and an Aboriginal woman, that he was “personally opposed to all such unions especially aliens to gins” (8 January 1906, QSA A/A44680), and the Carns Protector stated that he had “received applications from Karakas to leave to marry Aboriginal gins but in all cases I have refused to recommend such marriages” (23 March 1905, QSA A/A44680). The Rev. ER Gribble sought to consult with Roth on ‘the numerous waifs and strays in the Chinese-infested districts around Redlynche and Kuranda’ (Roth Progress Report, October 1902, QSA A/A44679).
19. Rosalind Kidd, The Way We Civilise (St Lucia: U of Queensland P, 1997). In 1939 the Chief Protector became Director of Native Affairs. Thereafter the Department changed its name from Department of Native Affairs to Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, then Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement and, later, though with much reduced responsibilities for Indigenous Australians, Department of Community Services, Department of Community Services and Ethnic Affairs, Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs. It is currently known as the Department of Family, Youth and Community Care.
20. This definition excluded the children of an Aboriginal father and a non-Aboriginal mother. Prior to the 1897 Act, ‘half-caste’ had referred to any part-white persons, for example of African-Irish descent (example in QSA Col/A576 89/03138).
21. There is some uncertainty about the origin of Annie’s father. According to the family’s oral history he was from Niue in the Pacific, and this is supported by the name given in her 1891 marriage certificate, but Annie herself declared to the police on 1 April 1921 that her father was a native of Madagascar, and this is how reference is consistently made in the files used here, where Annie is referred to as ‘Annin.’ Annie’s mother was Zarazai, the daughter of Mauno (or Mano). This name became Sarah Manahou in Annie’s marriage certificate.
23. Anna Schnukal (’Contact and ‘Cultural Creolisation’ in Torres Strait,’ Australian Aboriginal Studies 2, 1995: 52-57) refers to ‘Pacific Pidgin English’ as the language which is also referred to as sandalwood English (Dorothy Shineberg, They Came for Sandalwood Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 1967) or colloquially as beach-la-mar (from bêche-de-mer, the sea-cucumber sought by Pacific traders).
24. Hugh Milman took over from John Douglas as government resident, and Charles O’Brien replaced George Bennet as local Protector.
25. This distinction only reappeared in 1939 when separate Acts were passed for the administration of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.
26. Interview with Starchy Ahwang, Mackay 26 June 1997
27. Ganter 1994
28. Interview with Starchy Ahwang, Mackay 26 June 1997
29. Mi Lesina, member for Clermont, Legislative Assembly, 8 October 1901 QPP Vol. LXXXVII 1901: 1150.
30. Lee-Bryce referred to this man as a Malay. According to family history, he was a Muslim from Delhi who had travelled widely as a sailor before settling at Thursday Island. The young woman was the daughter of an Aboriginal woman from Pennefather River who had been moved to Mapoon, and a Filipino from Sulu Island.
31. This name has been changed to protect the anonymity of living descendents. The woman is from a different family, unrelated to Ahwang.
32. Lee-Bryce, Protector at TI to CPA 14 March 1914, QSA A/58761
33. ibid.
34. ibid.
35. Removals Register, 1914: 56/66 QSA Z2688.
36. Lee-Bryce, Protector at TI to CPA 14 March 1914, QSA A/58761.
37. 11 July 1914 Clara Riley to CPA, QSA A/58761.
38. ibid.
39. 17 June 1914 Douglas Riley to Home Secretary (letter), QSA A/58761.
40. 28 September 1914 Order for Removal of Aboriginal under Section 9/1897 and Section 3/1901, QSA A/58761
41. 22 July 1914 CPA to Under Secretary, Home Department, QSA A/58761
42. CPA to Lee-Bryce 21 July 1914, QSA A/58761
43. 4 October 1914 Clara Riley to Atima Awang at Barambah, QSA A/58761
44. 14 August 1914 Lee-Bryce to CPA, QSA A/58761
45. 22 July 1914 CPA to Under Secretary, Home Department, QSA A/58761 This letter was annotated ‘Bleakley to see me.’
46. 16 February 1915 Lee Bryce to CPA, QSA A/58761
47. 19 August 1915 Atima Ahwang c/o Mrs. Cameron, Toowong, to Mrs. Beeston and 4 October 1915 Lee-Bryce, Protector TI to CPA, QSA A/58800
49. One of the Protectors, steeped in this rhetoric, had to be reminded by another department with which he was corresponding after the war that his incriminating comments about the living conditions of an Aboriginal/Japanese/Chinese family were ‘irrelevant for the decision to be made.’ Australian Archives Qld. BP 242/1 #Q24780.
50. 25 October 1917 CPA to Protector, TI, QSA A/58761.
51. 9 November 1917 Atima Ahwang, South Toowong, to Bleakley, QSA A/58761.
52. 16 June 1919 Protector, TI to CPA, QSA A/58761
53. 29 October 1920 CPA to Filewood, QSA A/58761.
54. 14 October 1920 Filewood to CPA, 20 October 1920 Filewood to Home Secretary, QSA A/58761.
There is some uncertainty about Annie’s father. He may have been from Madagascar, Niue or Barbados.

The reference to Madagascar stems from a statement by ‘Amin Savage Ah Wong’ to the police on 1 April 1921, QSA A/58761.

The Chief Protectors (or, after 1939 Directors of Native Affairs) were Roth (1898-1904 as Northern Protector and 1904-1906), Howard (1906-1913), Bleakley (1913-1942), O’Leary (1943-1963), and Killoran (1964-1986). The last three all served at Thursday Island.

My discussion of colonising views of polygyny is forthcoming as ‘Letters from Mapoon’ in Australian Historical Studies.