

Surfacing black and brown bodies in the digital archive: domestic workers in late nineteenth-century Australia.

Abstract

This paper examines the potential for the digital turn, particularly the extensive and ongoing digitisation of nineteenth-century newspapers, to enable scholars to rethink the experiences of individuals previously marginalised and hard to find in historical sources. The rapid digital turn in historical research has prompted scholars to argue for conversations in which to consider the implications of digital technologies in historical research practices. Yet in historical geography, though scholars work with and make digital data in a multitude of ways, there has been little formal reflection on the concerns, challenges or methodological opportunities presented by the formation of digital archives. To do so this paper takes as its focus 'coloured' workers employed in forms of domestic service at the end of the nineteenth century in Australia. Firstly, by resurfacing 'coloured' workers through their presence in newspaper advertisements the paper illustrates that digital methodologies enable the identification of individuals missed through previous forms of data analysis. Secondly, the paper seeks to illustrate how their reappearance can frame a rethinking of domestic labour and colonial identities, gender roles and the ethnic complexities of 'coloured' labour in the British Empire. The paper argues that though newspaper advertisements for employment are brief and impersonal, and their meanings, as mediated through form and time, are at times hard to decipher, gathering them together into a new archive supports a more complex reading of diversity across national, regional, local and imperial geographies.

Keywords

Digital archives; newspapers; domestic service; British Empire; Australia; Black history

Surfacing black and brown bodies in the digital archive: domestic workers in late nineteenth-century Australia.

This paper examines the potential for the digital turn in historical newspaper archives to enable scholars to rethink the experiences of domestic workers of colour in the late nineteenth century, while reflecting on the limitations the technology retains. The paper illustrates that digital methodologies enable the surfacing of racialised individuals who advertised for work as domestic servants, but were missed by previous forms of pre-digital sampling analysis. To do so the paper takes as its focus ‘coloured’ workers who were present in the Australian press, employing a methodology developed to extract the presence of black and brown workers in nineteenth-century Britain from the digital newspaper archive.¹ The paper then explores how drawing together this cohort of ‘coloured’ workers prompts a reframing of domestic workers and the racialisation they faced in the spaces of Australian newspaper columns and the places in which they worked. These places — the homes, hotels, steamships and clubs where such domestic workers

¹ Following Victoria Haskins and Claire Lowrie, domestic work or workers is used in preference to domestic servant and service as the work of an individual for another individual or family, carrying out personal household tasks in addition to cooks in restaurants and lodging houses. See V. Haskins and C. Lowrie, Introduction: decolonizing domestic service: introducing a new agenda, in: V. Haskins and C. Lowrie (Eds), *Colonization and Domestic Service: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, London, 2015, 1–18. On broader definitions of domestic service in Australia, see B.W. Higman, *Domestic Service in Australia*, Melbourne, 2002, 13.

were employed — were, as Julia Martínez and her co-authors argue, both ‘sites ... of intimacy’ and “‘contact zones” where the domestic was intimately connected to the international’.²

Identifying who was understood to be and may have identified themselves as a ‘coloured’ worker from Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, African, Indian, Pacific Islander or Aboriginal communities in Australia is made more complex by the digital archive.³ A letter written to Melbourne’s *Argus* in 1855 reflects on the many racialised identities a person of colour understood they could be associated with.⁴ The author wrote to comment on the trial of John Joseph, an African American charged with treason for his part in what became known as the Eureka Rebellion, at Ballarat, Victoria in 1854. He started by stating ‘I am half and half myself (and most likely what a Yankee would term a Nigger), bred and born under the British flag’. He signed off as ‘A Man of Color, and a British seaman, but a Digger of late’.⁵ When a young African American woman sought work as a parlour maid through the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1880 (see below), she felt the need to identify herself as ‘coloured’ and American, whether because of the engrained racial identities she brought with her from the United States, or new ethnic hierarchies she found in Australia, or both. The digital archive reflects the diversity of people working in Australia who came from both inside and outside the borders of the British Empire. Their coming together as people of

²J. Martínez, C. Lowrie, F. Steel and V. Haskins, *Colonialism and Male Domestic Service Across the Asia Pacific*, London, 2018, 3.

³ On the fear of mixed communities in Australia’s tropical north, see M. Lake and H. Reynolds, *White Australia points the way*, in: M. Lake and H. Reynolds (Eds), *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*, Cambridge, 2008, 152; on cosmopolitan Cairns, see M. Woods, *Rural cosmopolitanism at the frontier? Chinese farmers and community relations in northern Queensland, c. 1890–1920*, *Australian Geographer* 49 (2018) 107–131.

⁴ I first read the letter in D.E. Potts and A. Potts, *The negro and the Australian gold rushes, 1852–1857*, *Pacific Historical Review* 37 (1968) 381–399.

⁵ The acquittal of Joseph, *The Argus* (Melbourne), 9 March 1855, 6.

colour in Australia underscores the importance of connecting African American experiences in the Black Pacific to colonial and colonised communities in the British Empire.⁶

BLACK AND BROWN BODIES AND THE DIGITAL TURN

As part of the digital turn, digitised newspapers are being made available to scholars in vast quantities.⁷ In the early 2000s, the British Library newspaper archive project added eight thousand pages a day to its collection.⁸ This paper is based on an examination of advertisements placed in newspapers published throughout the Australian colonies which are available on Trove, an online digital archive which has its origins in a project launched by the National Library of Australia in 2008.⁹ At the time of writing there are an estimated 7700 digitised titles in this collection, making 23,115,511 newspaper pages and 2,026,782 gazette pages available to view.¹⁰ Trove works closely with the Australian Newspaper Plan (ANPlan) whose mission is to ensure that newspapers published in Australia are collected and

⁶ On geographies of the Black Pacific, see R. Shilliam, *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections*, London, 2015; E. Taketani, 'The cartography of the Black Pacific: James Weldon Johnson's *Along This Way*', *American Quarterly* 59 (2007) 79–106.

⁷ A.J. Torget, R. Mihalcea, J. Christensen and G. McGhee, 'Mapping texts: combining text-mining and geo-visualization to unlock the research potential of historical newspapers', *University of North Texas Digital Library*, 2011, <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc83797/> last accessed 16 June 2019.

⁸ B. Nicholson, 'The digital turn: exploring the methodological possibilities of digital newspaper archives', *Media History* 19 (2013) 59–73.

⁹ About Trove, National Library of Australia, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/general/about>, last accessed 21 June 2019; M. Ayres, 'Singing for their supper': Trove, Australian newspapers, and the crowd, 2013. <http://library.ifla.org/245/1/153-ayres-en.pdf>.

¹⁰ About Newspapers – Trove, National Library of Australia, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/about>; information on how newspapers are selected is available from National Library of Australia, <https://www.nla.gov.au/content/newspaper-digitisation-program>, last accessed 21 June 2019.

preserved for permanent access.¹¹ As Thomas Smits observes, it is not clear how close they are to this goal, but new pages are added daily.¹²

These millions of pages are made accessible via scans and an optical character recognition system. To help mitigate for the unevenness of quality across the archive (for example, the poorer quality of older newspapers), members of the public can volunteer to correct transcriptions.¹³ It is an immense community crowd sourcing project; over 14,000 corrections can occur in a single day. A leader board of the 'top text correctors' appears on Trove's 'digitised newspaper and more' search page, and at the time of writing the three highest contributors had made over twelve million amendments. These figures point to the rapid development of digital newspaper archives and historical scholars have called for 'discipline-specific conversations' to carefully consider the full range of digital technologies in historical research, and the 'epistemological implications for how we discover, access, and make sense of the past'.¹⁴ Yet in historical geography, though we work with and make digital data in a multitude of ways, there has been little formal reflection on the concerns, challenges or methodological opportunities presented by the formation of digital archives, and no specific consideration of digital newspaper archives.¹⁵ In their 2018 paper on the

¹¹ National and State Libraries Australia, <https://www.nsla.org.au/projects/anplan>, last accessed 2 June 2020.

¹² T. Smits, Looking for The Illustrated London News in Australian Digital Newspapers, *Media History* 23 (2017) 80–99.

¹³ M.K. Sunghwan and S. Cassidy. Finding names in Trove: named entity recognition for Australian historical newspapers, *Proceedings of the Australasian Language Technology Association Workshop 2015*, 57–65. This paper includes details of the OCR system.

¹⁴ J. Solberg, Googling the archive: digital tools and the practice of history, *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 15 (2012) 54.

¹⁵ K. Offen, Historical geography II: digital imaginations, *Progress in Human Geography* 37 (2013) 564–577. Newspapers are not mentioned in D.W. Holdsworth, Historical geography: new ways of imaging and seeing the past, *Progress in Human Geography* 27 (2003) 486–493. On subject intersections, see P.B. Jaskot, Commentary: art-historical questions, geographic concepts, and digital methods, *Historical Geography* 45 (2017) 92–99.

digital turn in geography, James Ash, Rob Kitchen and Agnieszka Leszczynski mention 'newspapers' in a reference not to historical geography but to the 'digital humanities'.¹⁶

In his exploration of possibilities emerging from the digital turn in newspaper records, Bob Nicholson highlights genealogists and biographers, linguists, literary critics and cultural historians as clusters of researchers who will clearly benefit. A key advantage is the ability to map data – though he does not use the phrase – and he highlights the 'extraordinary new opportunities to track the usage, circulation and evolution of language', in addition to tracing 'the development of movement of ideas and discursive formations in ways that were once impossible'.¹⁷ These frameworks and methodologies are all key to scholars of historical geography, as highlighted by Fiona Black in her discussion of GIS and book history, but historical geographers are not referenced in Nicholson's list.¹⁸ Elsewhere, Karl Offen has highlighted Indigenous geographies as a key theme for historical geographers working with digital materials. Yet while Nicholson is keen to emphasise that a failure to address the imaginative possibilities of digital methodologies is fraught with danger, he does not mention race or ethnicity in his reflections. Overall, where historical geography is discussed within debates on the 'digital turn' it is usually in the context of 'Historical GIS'.¹⁹

Offen cautions against the idea that 'historical geographers should somehow adapt their questions, research agendas, or methods to the demands of digital technologies or the

¹⁶ J. Ash, R. Kitchin, and A. Leszczynski, Digital turn, digital geographies? *Progress in Human Geography* 42 (2018) 25–43.

¹⁷ Nicholson, The digital turn, 63.

¹⁸ F.A. Black, Construing the spaces of print culture: book historians' visualization preferences, in: M. Ogborn and C.W.J. Withers (Eds), *Geographies of the Book*, Farnham, 2010, 79–108.

¹⁹ Offen, Historical geography II. On the possibilities opened up by digital methods, see L.C. Smith, Visualizing indigenous women in Oaxaca, Mexico at the end of the twentieth century, *Historical Geography* 40 (2012) 61–83. For example, I. Gregory and D. Cooper, Geographical technologies and the interdisciplinary study of peoples and cultures of the past, *Journal of Victorian Culture* 18 (2013) 265–272.

institutions or interests that promote their use'.²⁰ Here, I argue that an adaptation to the methods of the technology of the digital newspaper archive offers opportunities to explore historical geographies of marginalised groups who were, as Kathryn Hunter observes, 'previously silenced in the historical narrative, because of their obscurity and the labour it would have taken to recover them'.²¹ This is not only about the 'practical revolution' of 'speed, access, volume and convenience' that digitisation provides.²² The digital archive allows marginalised individuals, in this paper men and women often identified in the nineteenth century as 'coloured', to be picked out from the printed crowd where pre-digital methodologies were unable to find them.

As Nicholson has articulated, though a digitised issue of a newspaper may look like its paper original, 'it is not the same source; we are able to access, read, organise and analyse it in radical new ways'.²³ But, as Jessica Johnson stresses, these sources remain vulnerable to reproducing the violence and brutality of the colonial archives of which they are a structural part. Johnson reminds scholars of transatlantic history that 'there is no bloodless data in slavery's archive'.²⁴ Similarly, colonial era newspapers are inscribed with the power, violence and injustices of imperial settlement. As such the method of using 'keywords' to extract material from the archives is problematic, requiring the inputting of racialised words into databases. I use the term 'targeted word search' to avoid ascribing racist terms the authority of keywords – but the words are still used. There is, as Johnson

²⁰ Offen, *Historical geography II*, 572.

²¹ K. Hunter, *Silence in noisy archives: reflections on Judith Allen's 'Evidence and Silence – Feminism and the Limits of History'*, 1986, in the era of mass digitisation, *Australian Feminist Studies* 32 (2017) 204.

²² Nicholson, *The digital turn*, 61.

²³ Nicholson, *The digital turn*, 64.

²⁴ J.M. Johnson, *Markup bodies: Black [life] studies and slavery [death] studies at the digital crossroads*, *Social Text* 36 (2018) 58 and 70.

reflects, a complicated relationship between the bodies of colour in the archive and the 'digital humanities' drive for data'.²⁵

The advertisements discussed in this paper emerged from a search of Trove newspapers from all 'places' in Australia. In Trove results are sorted into and can be 'refined' by 'places' — New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territories. National and international categories may also be highlighted, though they were not for the searches undertaken here. Results can be further 'refined' by filtering by the title of a newspaper or a 'category' relating to newspaper content; for example, articles, family notices, classified advertisements. Here results were filtered through 'advertisements' within the search timeline of January 1880 until December 1901, the year the Federal Australian government was inaugurated and instigated its policy of White Australia.²⁶ Initially this involved legislating to remove Pacific Islanders who had been brought to work under oppressive conditions on the sugar plantations of Queensland.²⁷ Further legislation, through the Immigration Restriction Act (1901), 'was passed to ensure that other "non-whites" would be prevented from coming to settle in Australia'.²⁸ This demand for the privileging of whiteness came in a global context of efforts to embed white supremacy in state structures and enforce the marginalisation of black and brown bodies.²⁹ These racist ideas and policies are now deeply buried in 'digital architecture', from keyword search terms to the inaccurate results created by poor readings

²⁵ Johnson, Markup bodies, 58.

²⁶ Advertising is a 'category' among many, for example, Article, Literature, Family Notices and Letters.

²⁷ On criticisms of their treatment, see C. Bressey, *Race, Empire and the Politics of Anti-Caste*, London, 2013.

²⁸ Lake and Reynolds, *White Australia points the way*, 137.

²⁹ For different national examples, see Lake and Reynolds (Eds), *Drawing the Global Colour Line*.

by the optical character recognition system.³⁰ The target searches undertaken to surface some of the bodies of colour included: *Coloured Man*, *Coloured Lady*, *Coloured Woman*, *Coloured Apply*, *Coloured Preferred*, *Coloured Cook*, *Chinese Cook*, *Indian Cook*, *Houseboy*, *Irish Apply*, *Native Boy*, *Native Girl*. Such terms and their results include terminology that today is understood to be racist, sexist, derogatory and insensitive; readers may find some of the language in this paper confronting.³¹

As Johnson warns, undertaking embodied histories of black bodies in digital archives means engaging with 'pained intimacy, and likely, some violence'; but we need to find ways to undertake this work which 'grapples with the uncomfortable, messy, and unquantifiable'. Where these familiar difficulties intersect with the desirability of 'big data' the digital archive meets recognisable inadequacies: how to make visible those who remain rendered invisible in even vastly extended archives; how to bring forth the lives of those made 'faceless, anonymous, disembodied' by lines of printed text.³² The advertisements here are sometimes references to individuals. They are also descriptions of jobs that may or may not have been filled, and, when filled, the work may or may not have been undertaken by a person who seemingly fitted any ethnic requirements placed in an advertisement. As important are the individuals who are not picked up by the digital scans or human text correctors, those people of colour who did not mention their ethnicity in any advert they might have placed, those who answered advertisements in breach of any declared preferences, and the Aboriginal men and women who by the 1880s had little hope of performing such expressions of identity in newspaper advertisements.

³⁰ Johnson, Markup bodies, 58.

³¹ This warning is adapted from the warning used by the State Records of Western Australia, Government of Western Australia, <https://www.sro.wa.gov.au/archive-collection/collection/aboriginal-records>, last accessed 2 June 2020.

³² Johnson, Markup bodies, 71

This paper does not claim to be presenting representational numerical conclusions regarding the material that can be surfaced from the Trove archive; there are no graphs or charts. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, as Andrew Torget and his co-authors observe, searching for particular terms within digital newspapers can produce datasets that are far too large for individual scholars to analyse in meaningful ways using traditional methods; the digitisation of newspapers is creating an 'age of abundance' which 'can simply overwhelm researchers'.³³ As an example, the returns for a simple search of Trove for 'Coloured AND English' between the filter dates of 1880 and 1901 returns over 400,000 results, and over 250,000 from the advertisement pages. These cover announcements from top quality coloured billiard balls to Donaldson and Andrews' first shipment of autumn goods in 1900 which included French and English coloured dress materials.³⁴ It might be possible with the additional people, skills and time brought together by a large big data project to create computation for such outputs, but the vast number of articles available on Trove (over 150 million in 2015), means sampling is still likely to be required.³⁵

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly for the concerns over the representation of black bodies in the digital archive raised above, these would not offer greater certainty. As Vincent Brown observes:

The historical geography of enslavement offers few sure routes to dependable knowledge. Searching archival records and the historiography of slavery for

³³ Torget, Mihalcea, Christensen and McGhee, Mapping texts, 4.

³⁴ *The South Australian Register*, 28 February 1900, 4; Billiard balls, *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney), 18 June 1881, 42

³⁵ See Sunghwan and Cassidy, Finding names in Trove.

insights into enslaved experience often makes us feel as if we are facing the void: absence, silence, negation, death, perhaps even cultural genocide.³⁶

In searching for people of colour in nineteenth-century newspapers I have also faced absences, silence and negation. An examination of Australian colonial newspapers is also a going over of death and cultural genocide, though this violence is rarely overtly present in the ordered columns of the advertisement pages. I share Kathryn Hunter's concerns that 'digitisation has brought about a strengthening of positivism' and that there is a danger that a new wave of 'ultra-empiricism' may erode 'our acceptance that there are silences that must be managed and mitigated'.³⁷ This can be illustrated by the representation of the 'houseboy' in the newspapers available on Trove. Martínez and Lowrie show that before the effective banning of 'coloured' labour migration in 1901, households in Darwin employed Malay and Chinese men. They also identify the term 'houseboy' being used to describe Aboriginal male servants in Darwin.³⁸ A search for 'houseboy' in the advertising pages in Trove between 1880 and 1901 brought forth 422 returns. The majority (316) occur in newspapers published in Western Australia, followed by forty-four from newspapers based in New South Wales, including:

Wanted, a respectable and well-behaved BOY about 14 years old, to act as houseboy and attend to horses. Apply M.H. Samson.

³⁶ V. Brown, Mapping a slave revolt: visualizing spatial history through the archives of slavery, *Social Text* 33 (2015) 134. Brown suggests that there are also perhaps some spaces of optimism.

³⁷ Hunter, *Silence in noisy archives*, 204.

³⁸ J. Martínez, and C. Lowrie, Colonial constructions of masculinity: transforming Aboriginal Australian men into 'houseboys', *Gender & History* 21 (2009) 305–323; Martínez, Lowrie, Steel and Haskins, *Colonialism and Male Domestic Service*, have identified that this led to complaints in the press regarding their levels of pay.

Clarence and Richmond Examiner (Grafton, NSW) 23 August

1890, 5

WANTED, respectable LAD as Houseboy (English only), not over 15. Superintendent Boys' Brigade, Sussex-st.

The Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 19 February 1892, 8.

Wanted for a Station, Japanese or Goanese as under House-boy, refs. Apply ... Bayswater rd.

The Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 16 February 1901, 5.

There are none from newspapers published in the Northern Territories. Removing the advertisement filter from this search brought forth one further result, a court report on a dispute between a client and their builder which included the opinion that the builder 'had showed in his own evidence that he had no more right to describe himself as an architect, than had the cook or house-boy at any of the licensed hotels in Palmerston'.³⁹ This lack of returns for the 'houseboy' in Northern Territory newspapers suggests much about the structure, content, concerns and preservation of those newspapers, but does not convey the domestic service employment practices of settler families in Darwin. This example also speaks to the deepest problem with numerical studies and black bodies in Australia – the

³⁹ *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* (Darwin), 13 December 1889, 2.

consistent under-reporting of the presence of Aboriginal peoples in archival records.⁴⁰ As Hunter has argued, the silencing, erasure and ways in which Aboriginal peoples are made visible in archives remains as much a challenge in the digital age as before.⁴¹

Even with these limitations, the possibilities for exploring ethnically diverse histories of Australia are profoundly changed by the establishment of Trove. It enables individual researchers to scan vast collections across timespans and geographies to a degree that was unimaginable before such databases became available.⁴² For example, Kate Bagnall has explained how she has been able to identify and map the lives of some of the earliest Chinese women living in New South Wales, part of a project she had 'once abandoned as being too hard'.⁴³ Without the large-scale digitisation of newspaper archives, the review of Australian newspaper advertisements for references to 'coloured' labour presented here would not be possible.

REMAPPING HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHIES OF 'COLOURED WORKERS' IN AUSTRALIA

While searching for information on British men and women of African descent in digitised British newspapers it became apparent that the advertisement pages were an archival space where 'coloured' workers could be found, and unusually their advertisements presented articulations of identity voiced by working-class individuals. By using filtering

⁴⁰ For example, the 1971 Census was the first Australian Census to fully include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Museums Victoria, <https://origins.museumsvictoria.com.au/census/>, last accessed 2 June 2020.

⁴¹ Hunter, Silence in noisy archives.

⁴² See A. Bingham, The digitization of newspaper archives: opportunities and challenges for historians, *Twentieth Century British History* 21 (2010) 225–231; Nicholson, The digital turn, 69.

⁴³ K. Bagnall, Early Chinese newspapers: Trove presents a new perspective on Australian history, National Library of Australia, 2015. <https://www.nla.gov.au/stories/blog/trove/2015/02/19/early-chinese-newspapers>, last accessed 2 December 2019.

systems to focus on these sections of the newspaper, it was possible to bring to light individuals working as nurses, butlers and cooks as well as actors and entertainers. It is this method which revealed two advertisements connecting the Black presence in Britain to Australia:

As nurse, to a baby, with a family going to Australia, a middle-aged, coloured woman. Experienced and well recommended. Not seasick – M T., Mr Nicholl's Book-seller, Upper Norwood.

The Times, 22 May 1885, 14.

A Young Coloured Man Wants Situation as Handy Man; Just from Australia; very handy with carpenters' tools – Address by letter, 13 Travis street, Barry Dock.

Western Mail (Cardiff), July 1900, 2.

These advertisements give some insight into the hopes for adventure and travel within the empire held by 'coloured' men and women in common with many of their white peers and raise the question of how these individuals' understanding of their blackness changed in different sites of empire. Yet, they give little indication as to why an individual would mention they were a person of colour in an advertisement. The most likely explanation seems to be that it was to attract employment from particular sectors or to avoid the humiliation of being rejected when individuals arrived for an interview with a potential employer.

In his landmark study, *Domestic Service in Australia* (2002), B.W. Higman undertook, pre-digitisation, an extensive and detailed investigation of advertising pages in Australian

newspapers from 1788 to 2001. He collected data from a particular day in the month of January, each year, from all the major newspapers in all the capital cities of Australia with a more detailed focus on the *Sydney Morning Herald* which holds the longest run of classified adverts.⁴⁴ Higman showed that the prominence of domestic workers in the advertising pages provided an important record for a group who 'rarely created a substantial archive'.⁴⁵ Martínez and Lowrie have observed that work on domestic service in Australia has mostly dealt with 'white servants and tends towards a class rather than "race" analysis'.⁴⁶ Higman did consider workers of colour, but his study found that those looking for work rarely mentioned their birthplace or ethnicity. Nor did he find that 'coloured' workers accounted for significant numbers of the servant population. For example, he calculated that Aboriginal and Chinese men working as domestic servants combined accounted for less than one percent of the total recorded in the 1861 Victoria census.⁴⁷

In the detailed sample of advertisements Higman collected from the *Sydney Morning Herald* between 1861 and 1891, only five percent of those seeking work mentioned their ethnicity, usually either English or Scotch. Higman found no Irish or Aboriginal identifications and only once, in 1891, did he find a man who described himself as 'coloured' along with another in 1891 for a man who identified himself as Chinese.⁴⁸ Though small in number, that some people did declare their ethnic origins prompted him to question why. Perhaps, he suggested, it illustrated a desire to find an employer with a similar background, or a plea for sympathy from a fellow national. As I concluded from the examples from British newspapers, Higman speculated that such identifications may also have acted as a

⁴⁴ See Higman, *Domestic Service*, 285–290.

⁴⁵ Higman, *Domestic Service*, 17.

⁴⁶ Martínez and Lowrie, Colonial constructions of masculinity.

⁴⁷ Higman, *Domestic Service*, 61.

⁴⁸ Higman, *Domestic Service*, 63.

warning to prevent the indignity of the refusal of a job. Whatever their reasons, as in British newspapers, each word in an advertisement cost money and Higman concluded that few individuals felt such identifications worth the cost.⁴⁹

However, the expanded documentary record of the digital newspaper archive reveals the presence of numerous individuals, as the examples below show, who clearly did feel the need to pay to put ethnicity in their advertisements:

HUNTS LABOUR OFFICE – WANTED, Ploughman and General
Farm Labourers, coloured man as Boots, Farm Youths, Shoeing
Jobbing Smith.

South Australian Register (Adelaide), 1 May 1885, 1.

GROOM and Coachman, coloured man; also good Gardener,
wants engagement. Mrs Alderson's, 27 Queen-street.

The Argus (Melbourne), 16 December 1885, 12.

A Coloured Boy, domesticated, wants SITUATION, cook, tend
boat &c. Fairview, Town Hall, Milson's Point.

Sydney Morning Herald [hereafter *SMH*], 22 October 1887, 22.

WANTED, Coloured MAN as General Servant; must cook well.

J. G. H., office this paper.

The West Australian (Perth), 5 July 1892, 5.

⁴⁹ Higman, *Domestic Service*.

WANTED by coloured man (married) Engagement as trust,
watchman, cook on station, can be recommended by leading
citizens of Brisbane. Apply M, G.P.O.

The Telegraph (Brisbane), 7 November 1895, 7.

Tracing the presence of 'coloured' labour in Australia is also complicated by understandings of the term 'coloured' in the late nineteenth century. Exploring the presence of African Americans during the Australian goldrushes, Daniel and Annette Potts concluded that in newspaper reports it could usually be assumed:

that 'a man of colour' applies to either an American Negro or a West Indian. Maoris were mostly referred to as 'New Zealanders'. Indians were 'Hindoos', 'Hindostanees', 'Bengalees', or 'a native of Hindostan' or Calcutta; and the Australian aborigine and the Chinese are fairly easily distinguished.⁵⁰

Their observation fits with references to North Americans in the advertisement sections of the newspapers. In May 1865, the parents of Caprel Carlyle placed an advert requesting news of his whereabouts in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Described as 'a coloured man, aged about 28 years', Carlyle had sailed from Quebec or Montreal in the spring of 1857 for Australia. His family believed he had finally reached Sydney, but placed the advertisement

⁵⁰ Potts and Potts, *The negro and the Australian gold rushes*, 385.

as he had not been in touch and they were anxious to hear from him.⁵¹ Some fifteen years later, an American woman who sought work as a parlour maid identified herself as 'coloured', American and respectable; a reflection perhaps of the racialisation of Black bodies in her home country:

WANTED, SITUATION, by a respectable American coloured girl,
as House and parlour Maid, or take charge of children.

SMH, 3 August 1880, 12.

However, the definition of a 'coloured' man or woman was not as fixed as this suggests. Bruce Mansfield showed that the coming of White Australia in 1901 was preceded by years of anti-Chinese attitudes, which can be found in the Australian press throughout the 1880s.⁵² Discussions on the 'Coloured Labour' question during the 1880s and 1890s clearly reference workers of different ethnicities under this label. An 1892 article in the Brisbane *Telegraph* on 'Cheap Coloured labour' was reprinted in a Queensland newspaper under the header 'Black Labor'. The original article drew together Javanese and Polynesian workers into its discussion of the 'suicidal silliness' of protests against 'coloured labour' in Queensland.⁵³ 'The Chinese Question' appeared as a separate issue however, and advertisements separate Chinese and 'coloured' workers, while reflecting an expectation that they could be employed in similar roles:

⁵¹ *SMH*, 29 May 1865, 1.

⁵² B. Mansfield, The origins of 'White Australia', *The Australian Quarterly* 26 (1954) 61–68.

⁵³ *Maryborough Chronicle* (Queensland), 23 January 1892, 3.

WANTED, coloured or Chinese BOY, make himself gen. useful.

Mrs Kay, 349, Liverpool st, Darlinghurst.

SMH, Wednesday 4 April 1888, 16.

Aboriginal men and women did labour in white homes as domestic workers. Aboriginal men were employed in the 'south eastern frontier'; they are recorded as domestic workers in the 1861 census of Victoria, and in late nineteenth-century Queensland domestic service was the main form of employment for Aboriginal women, as well as a form of employment for Aboriginal children.⁵⁴ Yet, like Higman I found no indications of Aboriginal self-identifications in the advertisement pages.⁵⁵ This is probably because of the repressive conditions under which they worked. The exhibition *White Apron, Black Hands* (Brisbane City Hall Gallery, 1994) detailed the harsh experiences faced by women contracted out to white people wanting domestic labour following the Queensland Aborigines Protection and Preservation Act of 1897.⁵⁶ Most had no choice over who they worked for and were subject to extreme surveillance and control. An article in the *Queenslander* celebrating the establishment of a 'Home for Aboriginal Women' in 1900, declared that evidence that 'aboriginal girls made good house servants' was provided by the 'eagerness' with which their services were sought 'by overworked mothers and wives'.⁵⁷ These 'overworked' white women were tasked with the 'protective surveillance' of these

⁵⁴ S. Robinson, 'We do not want one who is too old': Aboriginal child domestic servants in late 19th and early 20th century Queensland, *Aboriginal History* 27 (2003) 162–182. Robinson points out that official figures in Queensland are likely to be underestimations as European employers were not required to register Aboriginal employees until 1897. See also V. Haskins, From the centre to the city: modernity, mobility and mixed-descent Aboriginal domestic workers from central Australia, *Women's History Review* 18 (2009) 155–175.

⁵⁵ Higman, *Domestic Service*, 60.

⁵⁶ See J. Huggins, White aprons, Black hands: Aboriginal women domestic servants in Queensland, *Labour History* 69 (1995) 188–195.

⁵⁷ *Queenslander* (Brisbane), 10 February 1900, 271.

workers through their implementation of a set of published rules, including the payment of wages directly to the State's 'Aboriginal Protector' rather than to the women themselves, and the inability of women to leave their place of employment after six pm without being accompanied by a female member of their employer's family.⁵⁸ These controls were presented by the *Queenslander* as the 'responsibility' placed upon white women when they agreed to the 'training' of their Aboriginal employees.⁵⁹

The *Queenslander* also reported that finding residential accommodation for Aboriginal women had been difficult as landlords objected to them as prospective tenants and 'householders to the proximity of coloured people'.⁶⁰ This indicates that Aboriginal people were discussed under the label of 'coloured' but, given many Aboriginal women were effectively indentured labourers it seems unlikely they would be among the 'coloured' women advertising their services in the newspapers considered here.⁶¹ It is possible that some were able to circumvent colonial surveillance and seek employment independently, and such opportunities are hinted at by the handful of advertisements that specify Aboriginal labour. As noted above, Martínez and Lowrie identify 'native boy' being used to describe Aboriginal male servants in Darwin.⁶² Advertisements using variations of this term can also be found in newspapers published in Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth:

Housekeeper or Native Boy wanted, must cook and wash for
two bachelors, Guilford. Mr Reid Education Department.

⁵⁸ See K. Frankland, A brief history of government administration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from Queensland, *Queensland State Archives and Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs: Records Guide*, 1, 1994.

⁵⁹ *Queenslander* (Brisbane), 10 February 1900, 271.

⁶⁰ *Queenslander* (Brisbane), 10 February 1900, 271.

⁶¹ Haskins, From the centre to the city.

⁶² Martínez and Lowrie, Colonial constructions of masculinity, 307.

The West Australian (Perth), 13 February 1900, 8.

A Native Girl wanted for domestic service – “D.S.,” this office.

The Express and Telegraph (Adelaide), 16 February 1900, 1.

Given the extreme levels of control forced upon them, and the derogatory attitudes of white employers to Aboriginal peoples, if there were individuals who worked independently in domestic labour, it is not surprising they did not draw attention to their presence in such a public way. Such silences can have their own meanings. In the case of Aboriginal women performers in the early twentieth century, Hunter argues for their ‘evasion of historical mention as indications of agency’.⁶³ It is possible that any Aboriginal men or women seeking employment may have identified themselves in advertisements as ‘coloured’, but with such brief entries it is difficult to read against the grain for such narratives.

WORKING WOMEN

As the discussion above illustrates, newspaper advertisements for employment were brief and impersonal, and reading depth into their meanings can be difficult. The placing of an advertisement by any individual was no guarantee of receiving employment, nor was the placement of an advertisement, however general or specific, an assured way of gaining a new employee. As such, an advertisement does not, usually, equate to the presence of an individual person. Still, such advertisements can gesture to the individual experiences of those who made up different ethnic communities. In this section I focus upon women of

⁶³ Hunter, *Silence in noisy archives*, 209.

colour and explore how advertisements give an indication of their experiences of ethnicity and gender in the domestic labour market.

In 1891, a 'lady' reflected on the process of 'engaging a servant' for a piece in the *Adelaide Quiz and the Lantern*, a satirical journal which published short pieces of social and political comment. The narrator explains that she had never been able to keep 'a girl' in service for more than a week. This clearly was not her own fault, but that of the 'handmaidens' she employed. So, she placed a new, simple advertisement: 'Wanted, a good general servant; wages no object. Apply, &c.' The column describes the young women who called: one who arrived dressed in 'what in her own circle was doubtless considered the height of fashion'; the next plainly dressed and modestly spoken woman impressed her, but left the next day. Another advert brought more interested women, but one disliked the sleeping quarters and 'flounced out of the house', another spoke to her in such a shocking manner the author did not 'venture to write what she did say'.⁶⁴

The author was at an impasse, requesting of her audience that 'If any lady can recommend to me an intelligent Chinaman or even an aboriginal I will gladly accept his services, and wages again will be no object'.⁶⁵ Her declaration indicates that Chinese and Aboriginal people seeking domestic work could find placements, but it starkly reveals the racialised and gendered hierarchy of the domestic service labour market – in Adelaide at least. For this woman and her intended readers, white working women were expected to be far better 'servants' than Chinese or Aboriginal workers, though they were deemed in actuality to be difficult to manage, choosing not to take or remain in positions when working or living conditions were poor. The author's presumption is that only once all

⁶⁴ *Quiz and the Lantern* (Adelaide), 6 February 1891, 11. Edition details, National Libraries Australia, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/version/13700835> last accessed 2 December 2019.

⁶⁵ *Quiz and the Lantern* (Adelaide), 6 February 1891, 11.

possible avenues of employing white women had been exhausted would a 'desperate lady' consider employing a Chinese or *even* an Aboriginal person.

However, for some 'coloured' girls were their preferred employees:

A coloured girl (8 to 12) wanted, to assist in housework; no children. 145 Forbes-st, Woolloomooloo.

SMH, 8 January 1883, 8.

A Coloured GIRL, 9 or 10 years old: a good home and well cared for; open for a week. Address M.P. Herald Office

SMH, 30 July 1883, 10.

Wanted, nurse-girl about 14, for child (walking) coloured girl preferred. 7, Richmond-ter., Domain.

SMH, 7 April 1886, 20.

Shirleene Robinson has shown that twentieth-century reports on the treatment of Aboriginal people highlighted the importance of domestic service to the colonising project.⁶⁶ These advertisements also suggest a desire within households to take advantage of both the cheap labour of a very young 'coloured girl', while also perhaps enabling her employer to undertake the colonial performance of reforming an Aboriginal child. The following advertisement, published in 1892, could illustrate one form of resistance to this enforced

⁶⁶ S. Robinson. 'Always a good demand': Aboriginal child domestic servants in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Australia, in: Haskins and Lowrie (Eds), *Colonization and Domestic Service*, 97–112; Robinson, 'We do not want one who is too old', 165.

labour and separation from family and kin. The running away of Rose Murray from her guardian:

Lost, on Monday morning, Rose Murray, little coloured girl, aged 12, white dress, no shoes and stockings. Information to Mrs Gibbs, Store, Ipswich Road.

The Telegraph (Brisbane), 24 February 1892, 6.

'Playing up' was for some Aboriginal children an effective way of having themselves removed from white households.⁶⁷ In this case, however, further details given elsewhere in the paper reveal that Rose was of 'East Indian extraction'.⁶⁸ Her guardians stated they were anxious to hear from her, but Rose Murray had 'been missing' at least once before. In February 1890, wearing a black dress and no shoes, ten-year-old Rose had been sent on an errand from a hairdressing shop in Stanley Street, but did not return.⁶⁹ Rose's practice of absconding from her guardians/employers indicates how, along with Aboriginal children, other children of colour found themselves entangled in the oppressive structures of domestic work, gender and colonisation.⁷⁰

Working mothers with children faced additional worries, including the complexities of the 'transient nature of lone motherhood'.⁷¹ Presenting as single parents, the two

⁶⁷ Robinson, 'We do not want one who is too old', 178.

⁶⁸ *The Telegraph* (Brisbane), 24 February 1892, 4.

⁶⁹ *The Telegraph* (Brisbane), 21 February 1890, 4.

⁷⁰ V. Haskins and C. Lowrie, Introduction: decolonizing domestic service: introducing a new agenda, in: Haskins and Lowrie (Eds), *Colonization and Domestic Service*, 1–18.

⁷¹ T. Evans, The meanings and experiences of single mothers in nineteenth-century Sydney, Australia, *Annales de démographie historique* 1 (2014) 88.

women below sought to support themselves and their children through Miss Butler's registry for servants:

Superior coloured Woman as Cook and Laundress, with boy 14 years old; thorough female Cooks for hotels; Housemaids; two young Laundresses waiting engag'mt; also coachmen and Grooms.

SMH, 22 January 1889, 14.

Coloured woman with daughter, as Cook or Housekeeper, waiting engagement; several exp. Barmaids and Cooks, hotels and private; Laundress and Housemaids, Grooms and Coach'n, &c.

SMH, 16 July 1889, 10.

Butler's registry office regularly placed advertisements for male and female domestic workers in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and other New South Wales newspapers through the 1880s and into the 1900s.⁷² The advertisement to place a 'Coloured woman with her daughter' and a 'Coloured Woman with a child' willing to take a 'small salary' (*SMH*, 30 June 1889, 10), hint at the gender politics of domestic labour and single motherhood that women faced in Australia. Their need to accept low wages reinforces Shurlee Swain's argument that

⁷² Although fewer, advertisements also appear in newspapers published in Queensland and South Australia.

lone mothers who returned to or were compelled to enter domestic service were 'trading at the bottom of the market'.⁷³

All domestic workers who were also mothers faced difficult choices among few options for childcare. Swain shows that the royal commission on charitable institutions which took evidence between 1890 and 1891 learned that 'the going rate for boarding out' given at '10–12 shillings per week was insufficient to ensure the child's survival'.⁷⁴ The woman in this advertisement who made clear she was willing to accept 'small wages' despite her 'good references' may have planned to do so in return for keeping her child with her.⁷⁵ The wider body of advertisements points to the politics of intersectionality, for the need to take lower than usual wages was not only a plight of single mothers of colour. A young woman advertising herself for work highlighted her low wages, despite her language skills, and one couple offered to 'do anything' for low wages if they could be employed together:

Young Coloured Woman, splendid nurse, speaks English,
French, low wages, waiting 77 Russell Street.

The Argus, 7 January 1887, 1.

SITUATION WANTED: By good couple, coloured, S, S., garden,
milk, do any'g; wife cook, wash, Syd. ref. sm sal 83 M't St.

SMH, 21 April 1896, 8.

⁷³ S. Swain, *Maids and mothers: domestic service and illegitimacy in 19th-century Australia*, *The History of the Family* 10 (2005) 467.

⁷⁴ Royal Commission on Charitable Institutions (1893) quoted in Swain, *Maids and mothers*, 467; Evans, *The meanings and experiences of single mothers*.

⁷⁵ Through inquest reports Swain, *Maids and mothers*, illustrates that this option required women to attempt a difficult balance between work and childcare, and was far from a safe option.

These advertisements suggest that for workers of colour seeking to be employed, racism and an increasingly hostile environment towards 'coloured labour' during the final decades of the nineteenth century made their searches for work difficult. Being a 'coloured woman' as well as a single mother will likely have depressed their wages further than white single mothers seeking work, but like them they may have hoped to benefit from the benevolent attitude of a mistress who saw offering employment to single mothers as 'performing an act of charity', though Swain's research suggests such opportunities were rare.⁷⁶

These advertisements indicate how women of colour sought to navigate and survive gender roles and the ethnic complexities of being part of 'coloured labour' markets in one part the British Empire. That women understood how the colour ascribed to them placed them in labour hierarchies is illustrated by advertisements acknowledging the need to accept lower wages. That such ethnic hierarchies were not fixed is reflected in the words of the 'Black British Digger' who understood the multiple identities that might be ascribed to him at any one time. It is also demonstrated by those who did not assume an acceptance of lower wages; by those who did not place the colour of their skin in an advertisement; and by the absence of those who were not afforded the right to place an advertisement at all. All these examples illustrate how digitised advertisement pages can bring into view the diversity of 'coloured' labourers who sought work across the Australian colonies and those who sought to employ them. The following section highlights how advertisements indicate that the experiences of ethnic hierarchies may have altered for individuals as they moved through imperial and non-imperial spaces and across different places of employment from sea to land.

⁷⁶ Swain, *Maids and mothers*, 467.

THE 'COLOURED' COOK

In April 1880, Thomas Fiaschi placed an advertisement for a 'coloured man' to work for him as a cook:

WANTED, a coloured Man as COOK and useful, references.

Apply Dr Fiaschi, 39 Phillip-street.

SMH, 28 April 1880, 12.

Born in 1853 in Florence, to an Italian father and English mother, Thomas Henry Fiaschi qualified as a doctor in Italy and moved to Australia in his early twenties, practicing on the Palmer goldfields before moving to Sydney.⁷⁷ He would become part of the city's establishment, working at the Sydney Hospital for twenty years and serving as the honorary surgeon to the governor-general in 1902. This followed a military career starting with the New South Wales Army Medical Corps in 1891 and service with the Italian army in Abyssinia in 1896 before commanding an Australian field hospital in South Africa between 1898 and 1900.⁷⁸ Fiaschi's biography does not suggest that his advertisement's wording was to ensure that men of colour with good testimonials were encouraged to apply. Instead, the framing implies an intention to employ a cook who might be cheaper than others, or that Fiaschi's household may have associated this particular form of work with 'coloured' labour, as illustrated in the examples below:

⁷⁷ G.P. Walsh, Fiaschi, Thomas Henry (1853–1927), Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/fiaschi-thomas-henry-6165/text10589>, published first in hardcopy 1981, last accessed online 24 January 2019.

⁷⁸ Death of noted surgeon, *SMH*, 18 April 1927, 8

Wanted By Coloured Man, cook and useful, speaking Eng. And French. G Williams, 22 Best-st. Woolloo.

SMH, 24 November 1891, 10.

Chinese or Coloured BOY wanted, to cook and be useful; open two days, 81, Victoria Street.

SMH, 9 March 1886, 3.

Although men of colour listed their willingness to cook among other skills, such as gardening and milking, some advertisements made clear requests for men of colour to work as cooks. Mrs Shaw's office reflected such a demand in the *Brisbane Courier* in November 1893.⁷⁹ Their search for a 'Coloured Man Cook' is similar to others placed in the 1880s, including 'Men-Cooks' for the Melbourne International Exhibition which attracted over a million visitors between 1880 and 1881.⁸⁰

Some advertisements illustrate a perceived need, or desire, by some to unpack the meaning of 'coloured' in particular circumstances and give more specific ethnic identities:

Wanted By young Coloured Man, Indian, as Cook or Waiter, in gentleman's family; good refs. W.X. Herald Offices.

SMH, 5 May 1891, 8.

⁷⁹ *Brisbane Courier*, 17 November 1893, 2. Shaw's office also advertised an opening for a 'Coloured Girl' to work in the suburbs in 1894, *The Telegraph* (Brisbane), 5 July 1894, 6.

⁸⁰ *The Argus*, 21 January 1881, 1

Wanted Situation, by young couple (coloured, Americans),
man cook and baker, wife housemaid, is a good seamstress,
city or country. Harvey Robinson, 221, Castlereagh-street,
Sydney.

SMH, 19 September 1889, 14.

WAITING ENGAGEMENT, 2 coloured Boys, 1 Cingalese.
Fairview, Milson's Point

SMH, 11 January 1889, 10.

South Sea Island coloured [Married] Couple seek Sit., man
garden and useful, wife general. 83 Market st.

SMH, 30 March 1892, 12.

Martínez and Lowrie show that in Darwin, as in nearby Singapore, 'paid domestic service was virtually synonymous with the Chinese "cookboy" or "houseboy" who was employed by both Europeans and wealthy Chinese'.⁸¹ The digital archive provides examples of this practice beyond Darwin. In November 1888, the Grand Hotel, Waverley, advertised in the *SMH* for a 'first-class Chinese Chief Cook' and guaranteed 'good wages to a good man', while the Brisbane Queen's Hotel employed Lee Cheng, 'a very respectable China-man', as a cook in 1891.⁸² *The North Queensland Register* reported Tommy Goon worked as a cook at

⁸¹ Martínez and Lowrie, *Colonial constructions of masculinity*, 308; also Higman, *Domestic Service*, 61.

⁸² Good wages, to a good man, *SMH*, 17 November 1888, 24; *The Telegraph* (Brisbane), 7 July 1891, 2.

the Brilliant Hotel in 1899, and in 1901 the Commonwealth Registry advertised a 'situation vacant' for a 'Cook (Chinese)' in a hotel kitchen through *The West Australian*.⁸³

But such positions may not have always been easy to find. In 1891 the *Brisbane Courier* reported that labour unions were planning to boycott Chinese cooks and gardeners from 1 March that year, though the paper did not think, at that time, that their actions would gain the sympathy of the general public.⁸⁴ Six years later, George Mead wrote to the *Brisbane Worker* to complain that businesses were giving Chinese men employment 'in preference to whites', with hotels choosing to buy produce from two Chinese bakers, and some hotels employing 'Chow cooks'.⁸⁵ In 1898 the Queen's Hotel in Clermont, Queensland, advertised itself as having an English proprietor, good wines, 'and no Chinese Cook'.⁸⁶ By 1901, a 'Britisher' writing to the *Morning Bulletin* to celebrate a 'white Australia' which they thought was 'one of the most desirable things to be brought about' argued that it should be made an offense to employ any 'coloured' labourer 'even as cooks'.⁸⁷

An association between Chinese men and their employment as cooks is not present in Fiaschi's advert, and the indication from other advertisements that distinguish between Chinese and 'coloured' labour suggests Fiaschi was not looking for a Chinese employee. His requirements seem closer to the advert placed by Harnleigh House in 1889, that lists cooking as labour to be undertaken among other low skilled tasks:

WANTED, a coloured MAN, to cook, wash and assist. Harnleigh
House, Roach - st. Marrickville

⁸³ *The North Queensland Register*, 9 October 1899, 10; Commonwealth Registry, *The West Australian* (Perth), 31 December 1901, 8.

⁸⁴ *Brisbane Courier*, 13 February 1891, 5.

⁸⁵ *Worker* (Queensland), 17 April 1897, 10.

⁸⁶ *Worker* (Queensland), 24 December 1898, 1.

⁸⁷ *Morning Bulletin* (Queensland), 30 March 1901, 6.

SMH, 2 February 1889, 20.

The roles advertised by 'coloured' men also reflect the 'heavily gendered distinction between indoor and outdoor workers' identified by Higman.⁸⁸ This located them in sectors such as milking and gardening, or working as coach or groomsmen.⁸⁹

'NO COLOURED MAN NEED APPLY'

BUTLER, thoroughly experienced, coloured man, waiting engagement; highly recommended; Victorian Make Offices
42 Russell st.

The Argus (Melbourne), 2 April 1898, 6.

Wanted, a Man, who can cook and be useful, for country;
Protestant, Chinese, or coloured; man not objected to who has
good testimonials. The Home, 17, Clarence-street.

SMH, 2 September 1881, 10.⁹⁰

In a labour market where recommended servants were in high demand, a 'coloured' butler waiting engagement underscores the understanding in the advertisement

⁸⁸ Higman, *Domestic Service*, 132.

⁸⁹ See SMH, 30 November 1888, 14.

⁹⁰ The Home usually sought to provide for single women 'of every degree, ... when out of employment', SMH, 17 January 1867, 3; P. Cooper, *The Sydney Female Home: philanthropy and philanthropists in Australian colonial history*, 25 July 2016, <https://phinaucohi.wordpress.com/2016/07/25/the-sydney-female-home>.

placed by the Sydney Female Home that people from identifiable ethnic backgrounds faced open discrimination. Higman's sample of the *Sydney Morning Herald* did not reveal any examples of 'no Irish need apply' advertisements, but prejudice against Irish men and women took place openly in Adelaide newspapers:

Wanted, a General Servant. No Irish need apply. Total abstainer preferred. Apply, before 10am or before 5pm, to Mr Wiloughby corner Anthony and Todd Streets, Port Adelaide.

Evening Journal (Adelaide), 14 May 1880, 1.

Respectable Woman as Housekeeper Wanted in Bachelor's family. No Irish need apply to F.P. Smith, opposite Prince Albert Hotel, Wight-street, W.

The Express and Telegraph (Adelaide), 18 April 1885, 1.

When the Melbourne Milk Company advertised for new drivers in 1884, they emphasised that 'No Irish need apply'.⁹¹ Nor could an Irish man apply for the post of a trainee bootmaker, advertised in the *Melbourne Age* in 1882.⁹² Such prejudices did not go unnoticed. In response to an example of 'Gastronomic Sectarianism' an article in the Sydney based *Freeman's Journal* criticised the practice of the once popular condition that 'no Irish need apply' and lamented that they had hoped 'with the advance of civilisation such advertisements as used to constantly appear in the papers

⁹¹ *The Age* (Melbourne), 19 August 1884, 8.

⁹² *The Age* (Melbourne), 16 May 1882, 1.

applying for the services of Protestant ploughmen or Protestant girls to milk a cow had disappeared'.⁹³

The digital archive does not reveal the numbers of such advertisements implied by the *Freeman's Journal*, and, as in the case of discrimination against the Irish in nineteenth-century America, the balance between how often such openly discriminatory advertisements were published and the memory of this discrimination is impossible to fully recover.⁹⁴ In Australia, regardless of how often such advertisements appeared, people were angered and distressed by the practice. Yet though the *Freeman's Journal* railed against religious and anti-Irish prejudice, it did not address the evident racism faced by 'coloured' labourers:

Wanted, first-class Cook for Pialba. Apply Mrs Hughes,
Melbourne Hotel. No Chinese need apply.

Maryborough Chronicle (Queensland), 3 March 1883, 1.

Wanted Tenders for the supply of Firewood, ... Tenders will be
received at this Office up to 8pm on Saturday 9th inst. No
Chinese need apply.

The Northern Miner (Queenstown), 6 July 1887, 3.

Wanted, a competent Man Cook; no coloured man need
apply. The Mansion, 14, Bayswater-rd, D'h'st.

⁹³ *Freeman's Journal* (Sydney), 28 January 1888, 12.

⁹⁴ R.A. Fried, No Irish need deny: evidence for the historicity of NINA restrictions in advertisements and signs, *Journal of Social History* 49 (2016) 829–854.

SMH, 7 July 1888, 24.

Wanted, smart, sober Restaurant Cook. 117, Harris-street
Pymont. No coloured men.

SMH, 26 November 1888, 14.

Bearing these prejudices in mind, some employers did emphasise they would not object to 'coloured' workers applying for openings:

Wanted, smart Boy to assist in house-hold; coloured lad not objected to. Apply Canonbury, Hay-street West.

The West Australian, 9 December 1892, 5.

Youth for stables wanted; coloured lad no objection. Mrs Marsh's Employment Agency, 220 George-street.

The Brisbane Courier, 7 August 1889, 2.

These examples reinforce the difficulties workers of colour faced in the labour market. Some attempted to negate these by accepting lower wages, but not all advertised their willingness to do so. In 1892, a young 'coloured woman' sought a position as a cook with a 'gentleman's family'. She had good references and did not state that she was prepared to take low wages, though, on being offered a post she might have found herself

forced to do so.⁹⁵ This may have also been true for those whose identification as 'coloured' was specifically requested in advertisements, like that placed by Thomas Fiaschi:

Useful man wanted, coloured one preferred. For address apply
before 10:30 to Mr Foster, 144 William st.

SMH, 21 March 1888, 18.

Situations vacant: Cook, Butler, Laundress, same family,
Chinese or coloured preferred. City Registry, opposite Kirk's
Horse Bazar

The Argus (Melbourne), 30 December 1889, 8.

General servant, easy place, Manly, coloured girl preferred.
Miss Nisbet, Philip and Hunter sts.

SMH, 12 April 1900, 12.

Higman's theory that the mention of ethnic origins in adverts suggested a desire to find an employer or employee with a similar ethnic background can be read into these examples. It is possible they came from 'coloured' families and that they represent 'coloured' households seeking workers of a similar ethnicity, but ethnic preferences were placed for a range of reasons. The family above who sought a Chinese or Coloured cook, butler and laundress possibly alludes to a household of colour or one that was seeking to give benevolent employment. Such motivations are clearer, as Higman found, in examples of

⁹⁵ *The Argus* (Melbourne), 19 November 1892, 15.

religious preference, and adverts demanding Protestant employees are not uncommon.⁹⁶ These suggest employers seeking to give work only to those who shared their Protestant identity, a different motivation to the request placed by the Vienna Café for a ‘first-class’ waiter, with their general ‘foreigner preferred’ implying someone fitting the theme of this particular café.⁹⁷

In the case of a paddle-steamer, the ‘Agnes Irving’, the request for coloured labour could reflect an embracing of a particular kind of cosmopolitan life at sea, or the reinforcement of racial hierarchies aboard ships, though the two practices could exist together:

WANTED, coloured Woman as HOUSEKEEPER, Apply chief mate

Agnes Irving, Grafton Wharf.

SMH, 16 July 1875, 10.

The author of a column on ‘Coloured Entertainments’ in Sydney’s *Evening News* understood the position of ships’ cooks to be associated with ‘negro men’.⁹⁸ Though no advertisements requesting ‘negro’ ship’s cooks were recovered, there are newspaper articles illustrative of the connection. In 1897, the *Argus* reported on the case of a theft from Duncan McKenzie, ‘a ship’s cook, and, notwithstanding his Scottish name, a full-blooded negro’ who had recently arrived in Melbourne.⁹⁹ According to the author of ‘Coloured Entertainments’, the life of the ship’s cook was not an easy one, with the men being viewed as ‘social pariahs as a

⁹⁶ For example: An experienced trustworthy Woman required, cook and Laundress, must understand cooling, washing light, Protestant Preferred, *SMH*, 29 August 1888, 16.

⁹⁷ *SMH*, 21 March 1888, 18.

⁹⁸ *Evening News* (Sydney), 7 December 1881, 5.

⁹⁹ *The Argus* (Melbourne), 27 July 1897, 3.

rule' and the butt of 'a kick or an oath' from all on board, but one advertisement illustrates that these men had the possibility of using their skills to transfer to other positions onshore.¹⁰⁰ In 1882, Frederick Dewe Beach placed an advert for 'a good second cook' to work at his restaurant on Adelaide's Hindley Street; a ship's cook was preferred.¹⁰¹ By the 1880s, Hindley Street was the location of many of the city's eateries, and on the same side of the street as Beach's restaurant was Fung Sang's Chinese Eating House.¹⁰² Such 'ethnic' restaurants would have been noticeable places for Chinese, Indian and other 'coloured' workers to seek out sympathetic employers.

TRACING BLACK HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHIES

As Katherine McKittrick has observed, 'black diasporic histories and geographies are difficult to track'.¹⁰³ This paper has focused on tracing black geographies in two registers, the placement of black and brown bodies in the spaces of domestic labour markets in late nineteenth-century Australia, and the complexities of surfacing those bodies through the new geographies of the digital archive. This paper shows that the digital newspaper archive can surface greater numbers of 'coloured' bodies than former methodologies allowed, offering new opportunities for the examination of multi-ethnic histories. Present in the pages of newspaper advertisements are references to the coming together of people of colour in colonial Australia, peoples who were likely poor and marginalised at home as well

¹⁰⁰ *Evening News* (Sydney), 7 December 1881, 5.

¹⁰¹ *Evening Journal* (Adelaide), 3 November 1882, 1; Death of Mr F.D. Beach, *Chronicle* (Adelaide), 16 November 1885, 15.

¹⁰² McDougall and Vines, *The City of Adelaide: A Thematic History*, 2006, Adelaide City Council, http://opendata.adelaidecitycouncil.com/Adelaide_Key_Historical_Events/city_of_adelaide_thematic_history.pdf, last accessed 2 June 2020.

¹⁰³ K. McKittrick, On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place, *Social and Cultural Geography* 12 (2011) 948.

as in the Australian labour markets. Their presence is also illustrative of a degree of mobility and opportunity; the chance to take advantage of not being the same kind of black and brown bodies as those belonging to the colonised Aboriginal peoples of Australia.

The disparate and geographically scattered vignettes created by the brief lines of advertisement text are made visible because of the tools of a desk-top computer, a keyboard, a well-lit computer screen and access to a fast internet connection. There is no dust on my fingers to be rubbed off, delicate pages do not tear on turning, microfilm readers do not speed past their intended stop and spots on a page of microfiche do not elude like mercury slipping across a maze game. Thousands of pages can be troved in a single day. This methodology of recovery through targeted word searches can be captivating, even addictive; the ploughing through thousands of false positives in order to feel moments of elation when results turn out to be the start of a relevant story. There is clearly, as Hunter cautions, a danger in the 'seductive' promise offered by digital sources, in the 'ease of access to records we could never have hoped to comb in their analogue form'. But, like Jessica Johnson, Hunter asserts that while 'the labour of searching [is] less arduous, it has not transformed the nature of the sources we are searching'.¹⁰⁴

There remain familiar challenges: the unknowable number of 'coloured' men and women who cannot be pulled out from an archival crowd because they did not reference the colour of their skin in advertisements. It is quite possible, for example, that the 'coloured' man and woman who advertised their Australian connections in Britain at the beginning of this paper, identified as 'English' or 'Welsh' rather than 'coloured' in any advertisements they might have placed while in Australia; as may have been the case for the 'full-blooded Negro' with 'his Scottish name', Duncan McKenzie. If such individuals

¹⁰⁴ Hunter, *Silence in noisy archives*, 210.

identified themselves as 'Coloured English', 'Coloured Scottish' or 'Coloured Welsh' those examples are buried by the weight of the archive. Where individuals can be identified, their presence demands a consideration of complex questions of mobility, both of people of colour and the racisms they faced. Whether the young American parlour maid was perceived as similar or entirely different to 'coloured' workers from Britain, and how this might have changed as ideas underpinning 'White Australia' grew in popularity is hard to glean.

The young man 'just returned from Australia' who placed his advertisement for work in Cardiff's *Western Mail*, did so in 1900. With the coming of the White Australia policy and the increasingly open criticisms of 'coloured' labour, he may have utilised an option to return home to Britain; while the man placing the advertisement below, sought to or had to remain in Australia, hoping his many years of first class service would still hold value in this new era of Australian labour politics:

WANTED By Butler, Valet, Waiter, coloured man, long years
first-class references waiting engagement. Waiter, Argus.

The Argus, 26 April 1901, 9.

Although likely few in number, the presence, and perhaps the absence, of black and brown Englishmen and women in the archive raises interesting questions for the politics of whiteness. How might a blackness that is not the imposed otherness of Aboriginal peoples be integrated into an analysis of the racial politics of Australia and the British empire more broadly. These men and women were not other in the same way Chinese men and women were seen to be; African Americans were not British but they spoke English. Other people of

colour were English or Welsh or Scottish, and conflating their nationalities with whiteness is not easy once their presence is known. Cassandra Prybus's work has shown how the ethnic diversity of early settlers was erased by an historical narrative that refused to acknowledge or believe that early settler Australia included people who were not white.¹⁰⁵ Such challenges to the 'Matter of Colour' were reported in 1912 in the Storyettes column of *The Freeman's Journal*. When 'a prominent society woman' advertised for a cook and a waitress, she stated 'German or Scandinavian sisters preferred':

Shortly before the time of the arrival of the applicants, a well-dressed young coloured girl appeared. 'I came in answer to the advertisement, ma'am,' she said. 'I'd like to do chamberwork or waiting,'

'I advertised for Germans or Scandinavians,' replied the mistress.

'Yes, I know ma'am,' said the coloured girl, 'but you didn't say whether white or black, ma'am'.

Freeman's Journal (Sydney), 31 October 1912, 42.

It may be that the numbers of 'coloured' European individuals in the labour market were too few to challenge interwoven ideas of whiteness and European, including British, ethnicities. The documentary record made accessible by the digitisation of newspapers

¹⁰⁵ C. Prybus, *Black Founders: The Unknown Story of Australia's First Black Settlers*, Sydney, 2006; see also I. Duffield, From slave colonies to penal colonies: the West Indian convict transportees to Australia, *Slavery and Abolition* 7 (1986) 25–45.

illustrates that some individuals embodied challenges to such assumptions of whiteness during their working lives and their bodies, however scattered, continue to enquire for a placement, a place in the histories of local, regional and global labour markets of which they were a part.

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