‘The pathological native’ versus ‘the good white girl’: an analysis of race and colonialism in two Australian porn panics

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'The pathological native' versus 'the good white girl': an analysis of race and colonialism in two Australian porn panics

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ABSTRACT
Two examples of 'porn anxiety' have surfaced in Australia recently. The first of these is the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) intervention into 73 Aboriginal communities, instigated by the Liberal Coalition Government in 2007. A key measure of the NTER is a blanket ban on pornography in these communities. The second case refers to panics about pornification, concerned about the porno-saturation of young people's cultural worlds. In both cases, a straightforward connection is made between children, pornography and harm. However, the 'problem' is constructed in very different terms. Addressing a gap in the literature, this article explores connections between race, colonialism and pornography. I unpack how 'pornography, fear and young people' is incited in each case, how the problem is differently constructed in racialized terms, and how solutions to the problem are framed. I argue that the porn panics under examination are viewed through historically persistent racialized and colonizing discourses—in the NTER case, a particular racialized child becomes the focus, in ways that entrench colonial constructions of the pathological and degenerate other. In pornification panics, while fears are couched in terms of a general unraced child, anxieties rest on securing the goodness of the white middle-class girl.

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Introduction
Two examples of 'porn anxiety' have surfaced in Australia recently, cases which have sustained ongoing media, policy and academic attention. The first case is the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), an ongoing strategy instigated in 2007 by the Liberal Coalition Government in response to purported high levels of child abuse and violence in Indigenous communities (Stringer 2007). One of the keystones of the intervention involved passing official legislation to ban the use of pornography in 73 Aboriginal communities, the erection of signs outside communities stating 'NO PORNOGRAPHY' and 'NO LIQUOR', along with a series of measures to allow for direct state control of these communities. The second example centres on the phenomenon commonly termed 'pornification', a trend which has activated a powerful set of public panics1 concerned about the mainstreaming of porn across media and popular culture (Attwood 2006, 2009; Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa 2007; Attwood and Smith 2011a, 2011b; Mulholland 2013).
While each case is broadly focused on harm and danger to children, the emphasis of the fear is different in each example – in the first, the allegedly widespread use of pornography in Aboriginal communities and its connection to child abuse becomes the focus. In the second, panics are concentrated on the mainstreaming of porn in popular and media representations, and the ways in which a porno-saturation of culture might take over the hearts and minds of children. Despite the differences, what I am concerned about within this article is how panics about porn – in whatever form – illuminate broader cultural fears and anxieties about good and bad sex, the respectable and the deviant. In making this argument I prefer to focus on porn as a function, rather than an object characterized by a definable set of texts and representations. Indeed, porn is almost impossible to define, as is clearly demonstrated in reified popular and academic arguments about what defines ‘pornography’ (Sontag 1970; Williams 1989; McNair 1996; McKee, Albury, and Lumby 2008). As beautifully summarized in Kendrick’s oft-cited phrase, ‘pornography names an argument, not a thing’ ([1987] 1996, 31).

To describe porn as a function, or a set of arguments, relies on the long-established insights of sexuality studies and queer theory which argue that discourses of sexuality rest on the binary of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ sex (Butler 1990; Foucault [1976] 1990; Rubin 1984; Weeks 1986). In the modern Anglophone West, notions of ‘good’ sex grew out of emergent class structures of eighteenth-century industrialized modernity, whereby notions of respectability marked bourgeois sexuality as civilized and normative in relation to classed and raced ‘others’ (Strathern 1992; Finch 1993; Stoler 1995; Skeggs 1997). In contrast to bourgeois subjectivities, viewed as moral, restrained, civilized, decent, legitimate, worthy, self-controlled and self-determined, the ‘massified’ working classes and racialized others of the colonies were deemed pathological, deviant and potentially dangerous. Based on these raced and classed distinctions, ‘bad sex’ came to signify the out of control – the uncivilized and undisciplined – a form of sexuality attached and attributable to these raced and classed bodies. Furthermore, and by extension, respectable sexuality worked through a rigid policing of bourgeois women and girls, women who worked as powerful symbols of the civility and advancement of capitalist, industrial modernity.

This construction of ‘bad’ sex was also powerfully captured by the nineteenth-century emergence of the term pornography. As articulated in two seminal studies (Hunt 1996; Kendrick [1987] 1996), the categorization of pornography as distinct in newly emerging discourses of sexuality rested on its signification as ‘out of control’, uncivilized, disrespectful and unrestrained. As I explore in more detail elsewhere (Mulholland 2013), porn was established as the other to good sex because its frank and open explicitness challenged normative bourgeois sex – and as will be elucidated through the case studies, porn came to function as a border maker, a cultural regulator, a mirror to our cultural selves (Kipnis 1999).

Race is central to how porn functions as a border marker, a feature that is often overlooked in contemporary analyses of pornography and culture (Jacobs 2014; Miller-Young 2014). Setting these cases side by side as I do in this article makes visible the ways in which race and colonizing discourses frame panics and fears about porn. As Ann Stoler (1995) argues in her cogent critique of Foucault, discourses of sexuality, pleasure and power are always intimately connected to race – in the case of empire, worldviews that fortified and mobilized colonialism were based on constructions of the black uncivilized other as sexually close to nature (closer even than the European working classes), fluctuating between discourses of a romanticized primitive and a pathological barbaric native. In
either case, the black other was set apart from the white bourgeois civilized subject, which as already indicated was cast as civilized, pure, ‘above nature’ and rational. Other notable scholars of feminist race history (McClintock 1995; Haggis 1998; Crais and Scully 2009) have similarly argued that racialized hierarchies of empire worked through a gendered logic: white western bourgeois femininity was founded on establishing a discursive distance from black and working-class women’s bodies. Indeed, the ways in which the black other was constructed as ‘nature and instinct’ – uncontrolled and uncivilized – mirrors the ways in which porn was similarly constructed as the uncivilized other to good sex.

Several important papers have explored how dynamics of race and sexuality intersect in the panics which form the focus of this article. With regard to the NTER, Tedmanson and Wadiwel (2010) elucidate how sexuality is central to this form of neocolonial domination or ‘racialised combat’. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2009) also explores the NTER as a case in point for the exercise of a racialized form of bio-politics and sovereign power – throughout the ‘emergency response’, white patriarchal sovereignty is instrumentalized. Irene Watson (2009) reiterates this argument by elucidating how constructions of a victimized ‘black woman and child’ underpin the ‘originary violence’ of the NTER. With regard to sexualization and pornification, a growing body of work (see Gill and Scharff 2011; Egan 2013; Baird 2013; Renold, Ringrose, and Egan 2015) illuminates how fears about sexualization focus on a particular kind of raced, gendered and classed child.

Extending these analyses, I will ask: how do discourses of race, colonialism and sexuality play out in these case studies? In order to address these questions, I unpack how and in what ways ‘pornography, fear and young people’ are incited in each case, how the ‘problem’ is differently constructed in racialized terms, and how the solutions to the problem are framed. I argue that the porn panics under examination are racialized in several key ways: the problem of porn is viewed through historically persistent racialized and colonizing discourses, and the dangers posed to young people and communities are differently conceived. The ways in which white European bodies were made respectable through their distance from their black and classed others plays out in contemporary panics and fears about porn – ‘porn, blackness and pathology’ sit side by side with the ‘good, white and middle class’. Furthermore, racialized discourses work to secure the goodness of the white middle-class girl through a pathologization of the black other. Throughout these cases, porn continues to function as a border marker, marking out the good, white and respectable from the deviant, barbaric and pathological.

Two panics: the Northern Territory Intervention and pornification

The first case in point focuses on the NTER intervention into 73 remote and urban Northern Territory Indigenous Communities, instigated in 2007 by the then Prime Minister John Howard’s Liberal Coalition government in response to the Aampa Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle, Little Children are Sacred Report (Anderson and Wild 2007). This report was commissioned by and produced for the Northern Territory Government, and charted allegations of high levels of child abuse and violence in Indigenous communities – one of many produced over the years – requesting increased service provision, along with calls to recognize colonization and dispossession as important contextual factors. Ignoring the complexity detailed in the report, and the recommendation for comprehensive community consultation, Minister Mal Brough’s ‘emergency response’ involved military
occupation, backed up by a series of powers that abolished a well-established permit system which regulated access to the communities and allowed for direct control of these communities for five years. These powers were made possible by contravening international obligations under the Racial Discrimination Act 1975. As noted by Stringer (2007), ‘Howards positioning of the suffering of Aboriginal children as an exceptional circumstance mandating exceptional measures is an effort to justify these legal manoeuvres’. ‘Emergency response’ measures included compulsory medical checks for Aboriginal children, forced school attendance, restrictions on alcohol use, quarantining of welfare payments, and the abolition of community employment programmes (Tedmanson and Wadiwel 2010). Such measures were cast as inevitable interventions into ‘living hell-holes’ (Brough 2006), and into communities where ‘there are children living out a Hobbesian nightmare of violence, abuse and neglect’ (Howard 2007a).

One of the keystones of the intervention was a blanket strategy to stamp out the alleged widespread use of pornography in these communities, along with measures to prevent ‘the destructive use of pornography on the lives of children’ (Brough 2007, 13). This resulted in a ban on the possession and dissemination of pornographic material, and compulsory audits of publically funded computers (Calma 2009). This ban also included the erection of large blue signs outside the communities, declaring ‘NO LIQUOR’ and ‘NO PORNOGRAPHY’ in large bold text (see Figure 1). Media reports with headlines like ‘Only Radical Action Can Break Taboos’ (McManus 2007) and ‘Child Sex Abuse Rampant’ (Ravens 2007) made homogenizing and oversimplified claims about Aboriginal dysfunction (Proudfoot and Habibis 2013). In 2015 the signs still exist (now stating no ‘prohibited material’ in place of ‘no pornography’), and despite two changes to government since 2007, the Intervention continues with only minor variations under the Stronger Futures Policy (Stand For Freedom 2015).³

The second example of a porn anxiety refers to a phenomenon commonly termed ‘pornification’. Across the Anglophone West, and no less in Australia, fears circulate about the mainstreamed presence of a pornographic aesthetic across a wide range of media and popular representations (McNair 2002; Attwood 2006, 2009; Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa 2007; Egan 2013). Such instances range from Playboy products in tween and teen marketing, pole-dancing classes, porno styling on music videos, sexting and ease of access to porn on the internet (Smith 2010). This trend has resulted in a powerful and persistent set of ‘public panics’ circulating policy, media and popular texts (Mulholland 2013). Examples include Pamela Paul’s (2005) highly successful US book Pornified: How Pornography is Damaging Our Lives, Our Relationships and Our Families and Gail Dines’ (2010) Pornland: How Porn has Highjacked Our Sexuality. Australian examples include Tankard-Reist and Bray’s (2011) Big Porn.com: Exploring the Harms of the Global Pornography Industry, along with articles such as ‘The Pornification of Girlhood’ (Tankard-Reist 2008). Media headlines in Australian newspapers and television news media declare ‘Porn Images Part of Mainstream Culture’ (Leffler 2010), and ‘Sex Now Sells For Girls Before They Even get to School’ (Cuneo and Jones 2009). In addition, several important Australian government inquiries, which mirror others internationally (Egan and Hawkes 2008; Attwood and Smith 2011a, 2011b), have investigated the sexualization of children (Australian Government 2008; Western Australian Government 2013). Overwhelmingly, pornification ‘panics’ focus on the innocent and unprotected child consumer at the mercy of a normalized and mainstreamed pornographic styling.
The problem: porn, youth and danger

In both of the cases the problem is unambiguously couched in the following equation: ‘young people = porn = harm’. Across media reports, policy documents, popular texts and some academic analyses, fears revolve around the publicness of a supposedly
normalized pornography (Smith and Attwood 2011a, 2011b; Mulholland 2013; Renold, Ringrose, and Egan 2015). A ‘new normal’ is said to be emerging, whereby porn may lead to an ‘anything goes’ mentality, taking over the hearts, minds and behaviours of children who are exposed to ‘too much, too soon’ (Mulholland 2013). Indeed, this phrase is often used in books, media articles and advocacy campaigns (Levin and Kilborne 2008; Hamilton 2009). For the NTER intervention, the problem is presented as a commonplace feature of Aboriginal communities, along with a connection between pornography and child abuse. As Minister Brough (2007, 18) stated: ‘this government is hell bent on doing everything it can to protect innocent children. Children should never be exposed to this sort of material as they are on a regular basis in some of these communities’.

In both cases, fears about young people and porn are underpinned by discourses of childhood that emerged in the eighteenth century when children were construed as dangerously and originally sexual, requiring the interventions of parents, doctors, psychologists and educators to constrain this potential. During the nineteenth century, the focus shifted to notions of childhood as innocence, a time of life sectioned off from adult sexual terrains (Egan and Hawkes 2010; Jackson and Scott 2010). The sex of children – alternatively cast as ‘pure and innocent’ or ‘dangerously sexual’ – required management and regulation in order to achieve a civilized and respectable sexuality in adulthood (Egan and Hawkes 2010). As already noted, the invention of pornography in modern discourses set it apart as the scary other to ‘good sex’ – the civilized and respectable – and was connected to the invention of childhood. Fears about obscene material getting into the ‘wrong’ hands – anyone considered dangerous, unfit or incapable of consuming the material (working-class men, all women, and all children) – intensified in the mid-nineteenth century. Bourgeois girls and women were viewed as particularly vulnerable and corruptible, bound by imperatives for appropriate displays of gender, class and respectability which underpinned the establishment of the nineteenth-century middle classes (Kendrick [1987] 1996; Egan and Hawkes 2010; Egan 2013). Unlike earlier eras when obscenity enjoyed a more public presence, ‘existing cheek and jowl with the good’ (Hunt 1996), pornography’s function was to represent the secret and the banished – and as will be revealed in the contemporary cases here, to be prohibited for middle-class women and girls at all costs.

In both of the cases discussed here, the problem represents a continuation of these historical ideas about the corruption of childhood innocence and of young people as asexual and open to the corrupting influence of pornography. The voices and agency of children do not matter; what matters is the necessity for intervention, to ‘save children’ (Watson 2009; Attwood and Smith 2011a; Macoun 2011). This is a form of ‘child fundamentalism’, a term used by Baird to refer to the ways in which protective discourses rest on ‘the child’, a ‘discursive category with which one cannot disagree’ (2008, 291). Stringer makes the case that the ways in which Prime Minister Howard’s evocation of the suffering child ‘confers virtue, giving purchase on an apparently morally unassailable position that is outside politics and beyond the reach of criticism’ (2007, n.p.). This sentiment is mirrored by one of the ‘loudest voices’ against pornification in Australia, Melinda Tankard-Reist (Hastie 2010), who presents the issue as if there could be no possible objection of criticism:

I actually see this as an issue that is related to the slave trade. The objectification of women and sexualization of girls leads to them being traded and sold. We know that millions of women and
girls around the world are traded and their bodies are sold, primarily into sexual slavery … If you say it’s okay to repackage little girls as sexually available, if you say that little girls are just little adults in small-size and have sexual interests and can give sexual come-ons to men, then of course you are going to be reinforcing an attitude which enables them to be sold in the global slave trade … I do believe we have a duty to take this issue up.

**A ‘new problem’ for the ‘good white girl’**

While both cases rest on similar fears about childhood and innocence, the problem of porn and childhood is put together in very different ways in each case. First and foremost, in relation to pornification, the problem is presented as new – a contemporary crisis. Statements like ‘the unprecedented mainstreaming of the global pornography industry’ (Tankard-Reist and Bray 2011, blurb) are commonplace amongst anti-pornification writers and campaigners. Porn (the market, its content, its public presence) is set up as a kind of bogeyman, entering from ‘outside’, from previously secret places. An example of this occurs in an Australian 60 Minutes prime-time television episode. The reporter, Liam Bartlett (2008), introduces a story about the omnipresence of online pornography. Ominous music plays as a camera scrolls slowly across an ‘average’ streetscape, slowly moving to zoom in on an ‘average’ house. Against this background, he narrates:

> It could be any street in any suburb anywhere in Australia … of course, the keenest users of new technology are young people and a quick street survey confirms any parents’ fears about what their kids are watching online. (Bartlett 2008)

At first glance this ‘new porn problem’ is also presented as dangerous to a general child, seemingly unraced and ungendered – ‘our children’. However, as queer theory, feminist theory and critical race studies have long established, discourses of the general (of ‘our community’, of ‘our children’) rest on a particular image of the normative subject against which all others are judged. In Anglophone western contexts such as Australia, the normative subject is overwhelmingly white, middle class and heterosexual (Hage 1998; Moreton-Robinson 2004), bound by discourses that work to privilege the ‘White-Anglo’ subject at the centre of nation, civility and self-hood. With regard to pornification anxieties, the normative child is white, middle class and heterosexual. In addition to this – and important for the argument I am proposing here – this child is a girl, girdled by the discourses of class, gender and respectability described earlier. In *Becoming Sexual*, Egan elucidates how in the Anglophone West sexualization and pornification are rooted in very particular fears about girls who are white, heterosexual and middle class, ‘plagued by an endurably middle class fantasy of the poor and its seemingly corrupting quality’ (2013, 89). Fears are directed to a particular child, aimed at ensuring girls are ‘good’, respectable, and not too ‘over-the-top’ in terms of sexual expression (Baird 2013).

A similar argument is put by post-feminist literature, in arguments which explore how fears about sexualization are never about all children: ‘… different people are “sexualised” in different ways …’ (Gill 2009, 139). As Beverley Skeggs (1997, 2) notes, ‘respectability contains judgments of class, race, gender and sexuality and different groups have differential access to the mechanisms for generating, resisting and displaying respectability’. While it has become acceptable for girls to be agentically sexy, they must walk a very fine line between ‘respectably sexy’ and ‘slutty sexy’. Instances of slut-shaming reveal how class and gender intersect to sanction certain styles of sexiness, while maligning
others (Ringrose 2011). In my recent study exploring how young people negotiate pornified culture, young people made historically familiar distinctions about sexualized, raunchy celebrities. References to respectability implicitly referred to ‘white girls’ (almost all of the stars named as respectable were white, and when they were ‘not-white’ – such as Beyonce – their ability to ‘walk the line’ rested on markers of white western bourgeois respectability). A line is drawn between those who are ‘respectable’ and those who are low class and trashy (Mulholland 2013). This form of slut-shaming is presented in the most unadulterated terms by Sue McLean, federal government cyber-safety expert, in an interview for a national Australian newspaper:

But you also find that sexually overt girls are often targeting the nice, respectful boy you want your daughter to marry — they’re bombarding them with images. (Bita 2015)

**Porn: a timeless problem, a problematic community**

In stark contrast to the above, anxieties about young people and pornography in the NTER are cast as timeless rather than new. Media reports, statements by ministers and policy documents make constant reference to communities without order, function and norms (Macoun 2011). Here the problem is viewed through an orientalist gaze (Said [1978] 1995), in which historical binaries of ‘civilized/developed’ versus ‘backward/tradition’ colour anxieties about porn, harm and children. Prime Minister Howard’s summary of the problem in a prime-time Australian television interview could not put this more starkly:

What we have got to do is confront the fact that these communities have broken down. The basic elements of a civilised society don’t exist. (Howard 2007b)

Similarly, in a speech to Australian Parliament, Minister Mal Brough asks:

When confronted with a failed society where basic standards of law and order and behaviour have broken down, and where women and children are unsafe, how should we respond? (Brough 2007, 10)

Through the NTER special measures, pornography is viewed as exceptional – as exceptionally dangerous – in the hands of people from these communities. Indeed, ‘the laws enacted at the time relating to the control of pornography … were contrary to the principles of freedom of expression, and were not likely to be tolerated or “even arguable” if proposed for any other Australian Communities’ (Tedmanson and Wadiwel 2010, 14). Tedmanson and Wadiwel argue that:

The gaze of the Australian public, reflected in the media reporting at the time of the intervention, portrayed Indigenous communities as generically (and by inference, genetically) ‘dysfunctional’ spaces where bestial sexual transgression was the norm rather than the exception. (2010, 15)

Constant reference to an inherent dysfunction has colonizing effects: the communities themselves become the problem. In contrast to pornification anxieties, in which this ‘new’ problem enters from outside (outside ‘our community’ to corrupt ‘our good white children/girls’), through the NTER special measures, Indigenous people were targeted as the problem (Tedmanson and Wadiwel 2010). The problem of porn was attached to the entirety of a very specific population, spatially located ‘outside’ the Australian national
imaginary, and framed by colonial discourses of the timeless, backward, primitive other (Macoun 2011). Across popular media and policy justifications for the NTER, historically familiar tropes of the dysfunctional, savage, barbaric native were commonplace (Watson 2009; Tedmanson and Wadiwel 2010; Macoun 2011). In these representations the genuine problems faced by Indigenous communities are not connected to colonialism or the strategies of white patriarchal sovereignty – rather, they are reduced to a discourse of pathology (Moreton-Robinson 2009).

Here a particular racialized child becomes the focus, along with a very different construction of the ‘porn problem’. While the ‘children’ in both cases are viewed as passive victims, the Aboriginal child is cast as originally and innately primitive. For Aboriginal children, the problem is not porn per se, but a community viewed as inherently sick, degenerate and pathological. This logic was institutionalized in government policies from 1900 to the 1970s that saw the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families, policies aimed at ‘saving’ children (and particularly girls) from degenerate communities.

In contrast, for white middle-class girls, porn is the problem in absolute terms. Here discourses of sexualization and pornification aim to ‘save’ white girls from what is historically associated with the perverse and primitive, and a powerful equation is set up between black racialized bodies and perverse and primitive sexuality. This represents a continuation of the hierarchies of femininity set up in colonial and orientalist discourses: the white middle-class girl, while viewed as passive in terms of sexual subjectivity, is privileged in relation to her Indigenous counterpart as the symbol of goodness and normative sexual citizenry to be protected from external contagion.

The solution

**Liberal choices: parents, communities, markets**

When setting the cases side by side in terms of ‘solutions posed’, the ways in which porn is used to border ideas about race and sexuality could not be more blatant. In the case of pornification, solutions to fears focus on the market and ‘family’, couched in liberal frameworks of values, choice and freedom. Advocacy campaigns, media ‘experts’, policy-makers and teachers/sexual health educators recommend consumer action, calling for boycotts, and stressing the necessity for limited exposure to porn and pornified products (Mulolland 2013). In addition, parents become a key focus. As the Kids Free 2B Kids website states:

We parents play a key role in what we allow our children to see, watch and wear. However, our parenting is being undermined by the powerful forces of advertisers and marketers … It is time for parents – in fact, all adults – to take the initiative and decide what sorts of images we want our children to see … It is time for corporations to be held to account for the psychological and emotional harm that comes from sexualised advertising and marketing … It is time corporations listened to the experts who work with children and see the impacts. (Gale 2010)

Running across these sets of solutions is an unquestioned assumption of choice and agency to ‘families, parents and communities’. However, notions of ‘community’ and ‘fears for our children’ rest on a very particular kind of gendered children and on the agency and authority historically granted to middle-class parents (Egan 2013). In the Australian context, discourses constructing the normative citizen concentrate on the white
sovereign subject (Hage 1998) and choice and rights are ‘conditional on the perceived appropriateness of the individual, the measure of which is the good white citizen’ (Moreton-Robinson 2009, 77). Calling on the ‘virtue of ‘ordinary Australians’ who are already assumed to be ‘good citizens’ works to seduce a ‘white middle-class audience and affirm the characteristics of white civility’ (Moreton-Robinson 2009, 70). Baird (2013) argues that discourses of sexualization are grounded in broader ideas about national virtue and national identity. In panics about porn and pornification, privileges of whiteness frame who gets to speak, who gets to act and who gets to construct solutions to ‘the problem’. In addition, ‘the individualism of neo-liberalism’ (Moreton-Robinson 2009, 68) grants the white sovereign subject an unproblematised access to rights, choices and moral legitimacy, along with full access to the democratic principles of state.

**No choice: shame, humiliation, state intervention**

In stark contrast, the communities in the NTER are given no choice – drawing on constructions of the pathological native, the state argues that it is ‘forced’ to intervene. In addition, the NTER replicates past polices that de-legitimize the authority of Aboriginal parents, most notably the policy of the ‘Stolen Generations’. In this case, the state rather than families must ‘take responsibility’, or in the words of Prime Minister Howard:

… we are moving in, we are going to take control, we are going to ban alcohol, we are going to quarantine 50 per cent of the social welfare payments to make sure they go on food and essentials for children. Can I say in a crisis like this, what is wrong with that? I mean it is, after all, the responsibility that we all have and we cannot turn a blind eye to the abuse and neglect of children. I mean it is a terrible thing. What greater responsibility does any Government have? Howard (2007b)

Throughout the NTER roll-out, there was limited and cursory consultation (Stringer 2007) with Indigenous communities. As I have described, one of the central features of the NTER was the erection of signs that have been opposed as shaming and humiliating (Concerned Australians 2010). Professor Anaya, the leading human rights lawyer and UN Special Rapporteur who visited Australia in 2009, argued that this stigmatization is overt, and justifies UN criticism: ‘These measures overtly discriminate against Aboriginal peoples, infringe their right of self-determination and stigmatize already stigmatized communities’ (Anaya 2009). An Ampilatwatja resident stresses the shame and explicit hypocrisy of the measures, stating:

… blue sign … take em away! You pointing the finger at us! Whitefella they see that sign and they think ‘they must be really bad with that pornography’ … Yet you can still go into a newsagent in Tennant Creek4, adult bookshops and so on and buy all the materials there, but not here’ (Concerned Australians 2010, 45)

As other residents note: ‘I think you can go to Canberra and you can buy even worse books …’ and ‘Do they have blue signs there as well?’ (Concerned Australians 2010, 45). In addition to these pointed remarks, some humorous moments of grass-roots resistance are evident where signs have been spray-painted over with the words: ‘If you want porn, go to Canberra’5. The signs have recently been adapted to state ‘No prohibited material’, and while this is a minor improvement, some community members such as the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory argue the blanket prohibitions ‘serve no purpose other than the perverse stigmatisation of Indigenous men’ (Pazzano 2013).
In a classic colonizing move, the NTER solution regulates and manages the sexualities of a specific racialized community through these signs, viewed as incapable of proposing solutions to the difficult issues facing their communities. Tedmanson and Wadiwel (2010, 1) argue that ‘Aboriginal leaders had called for decades for genuine governmental support to assist in dealing with the plethora of challenges that are both a legacy of colonialism and dispossession’, and go on to argue that ‘the message in these controls was clear: pleasures that are tolerated elsewhere were deemed intolerable within the racialised “zones of exemptions”’ (2010, 14). Infantilizing and pathologizing the sexualities of black others has a long history.

In contrast to solutions which give agency to families and parents, the NTER ban on pornography also draws on historical precedents around ‘scary’ black sexuality. As Watson (2009, 48) argues, not only are Indigenous people shamed as treacherous users of pornography, discourses of the bad black man underpin this set of measures (see also Spivak 1994). She states:

The white settler frontierism of the past has been transformed by the NT intervention into the crusader of the present, rescuing Aboriginal women from Aboriginal men. (Watson 2009, 48)

These discourses have a long history in Australia, as Jessie Mitchell (2007, 230) articulates in her examination of the strategies exercised by missionaries and protectorates in the early nineteenth century to address the perceived savage sexual immorality of Aboriginal men. This savagery was situated within broader imperial discourses that constructed Indigenous men as ‘brutally lustful savages, hyper-masculine in their sexual aggression but lacking masculine self-control (identified as a European quality)’. In the context of the NTER, former chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Pat Dodson poignantly reveals this colonial trope, arguing that instead of ‘being treated as First Nations we have been reduced by media and government ideologies to sexual deviants and socio-pathic automatons’ (2007, 22). As Moreton-Robinson (2009, 77) argues, ‘the discourse of pathology is a powerful weapon deployed by patriarchal white sovereignty to gain support from its white citizens for the exercising of its power’. In short, while anxieties about pornified culture aim to keep such material out of the hands of good white children – already and innately civilized through the ‘goodness of whiteness’ – anxieties about porn in Indigenous communities aim to ‘save communities from themselves’.

This colonizing impetus to ‘save communities from themselves’ and save women and children from the ‘bad black man’ further reinforces the symbolic ‘goodness’ of white middle-class subjects in general – and within discourses of sexualization, white middle-class girls in particular. Within a broader representational landscape in Australia that represents race in particular ways, the NTER works as a powerful reproduction of historically familiar fears around class and race contagion. The sexual savagery and pathology of ‘others’ are constructed as powerful contaminating influences, capable of corrupting the goodness of white middle-class homes and children (Egan 2013).

In addition to strategies and solutions which shame and humiliate, NTER solutions work as a normalizing and civilizing mission (Stringer 2007; Tedmanson and Wadiwel 2010; Macoun 2011). In the words of Mal Brough, the NTER was to be rolled out in three stages: ‘stabilise, normalise, exit’ (Altman and Hinkson 2007). As Tedmanson and Wadiwel state:
This racialised agenda was accompanied by coercive administrative processes that aimed to ‘normalise’ Indigenous peoples and force incorporation into the ‘mainstream’ neo-liberal market. (2010, 8)

Indeed, as Stringer (2007) argues, the NTER opened up communities previously ‘closed’ to commercial and capital interests, while anxieties about a pathological sexuality work to reinforce strategies of neocolonial domination (Tedmanson and Wadiwel 2010). In this way, the ‘Northern Territory became the new laboratory for an experiment in Indigenous civility’ (Moreton-Robinson 2009, 68).

Conclusion

After nine years, ‘prosecutions for child sex abuse since the NTER have not been at levels above that in the general community’ (Happy Children 2012) yet ‘all indigenous people were shamed, blamed and controlled under the edicts and publicity surrounding the alleged widespread use of pornographic material’ (Tedmanson and Wadiwel 2010, 16). By way of contrast, public panics about the ease of access to pornography continue to focus on harm and danger, despite growing calls for more nuanced and complicated analyses (Attwood and Smith 2011a; Egan 2013; Mulholland 2013). Setting these cases side by side illuminates historically familiar tropes of race, sexuality and pornography. Firstly, porn functions (as it has always done) to work as the scary other to good, respectable sex. Porn and blackness are historically superimposed – representations of porn are never neutral to discourses of race and colonialism. In the case of the NTER, Australian Indigenous communities are powerfully affected through such representations. Indeed, it is possible to argue that Indigenous people become a form of pornography:

The very public debate about child abuse is like Baudrillard’s ‘war porn’. It has parodied the horrible suffering of Aboriginal people. The crisis in Aboriginal society is now a public spectacle, played out in a vast ‘reality show’ … this obscene and pornographic spectacle shifts attention away from everyday lived crisis that many Aboriginal people endure … (Langton 2007, 1)

Secondly, anxieties about pornified culture rest on the corruption of the good white middle-class girl, now at the mercy of a previously ‘secret’ pornography. In contrast, fears about pornography in the NTER further entrench notions of the pathological, violent native (Watson 2009), framed by social breakdown and dysfunctional communities (Watson 2009). In this case, porn functions (as it has always done) to entrench the degeneracy of abject raced others. When ‘porn’ and ‘Indigenous’ are put together as they are in the NTER, a picture emerges of an inherent, internal pathology. Adding porn into the equation simply serves to exacerbate this, thus requiring intervention from a civilizing hand.

Tedmanson and Wadiwel note the ‘pleasure’ taken in this new race/pleasure war:

Based in a deep ‘moral panic’ about the savagery of ‘others’, a tension is exposed between envy and disgust that oscillates from the lust for power to control Indigenous ‘others’ to the desire to ‘take care’ of the perceived vulnerable by regulating and containing sexual and other ‘pleasures’ – itself a perversely gratifying experience for the dominant. (2010, 18)

As is revealed though these cases of ‘sex panic’, the desire to control the savage Indigenous other cannot be separated from historical fears about class and race contagion, fears that ‘sought to regulate and normalise the erotic practices of the working class, the poor,
the immigrant, or the colonised’ (Egan 2013, 82). These seemingly disconnected cases are connected through historically persistent discourses about race, porn, respectability and sex. Representations of porn panic thus work as a function of colonizing violence, and are powerful representations overlaid with persistent ideals of ‘the good, white, and respectable’ versus the ‘black and pathological’.

Notes
1. I use the term panic here because it captures the tone of alarm circulating the issues, and describes a cultural anxiety about changing sex norms. Panic and anxiety are used interchangeably throughout the article. I am aware of debates around the use of the term panic – see discussions (for example, Lumby and Funnel 2012) that explore, for example, how the term panic can assume a binary logic and oversimplify how panics can set up neat divisions between ‘panic’ versus ‘concern’. I retain the use of the term panic here as this article is not intended as an overview of how moral panics are working though this issue (see Mulholland [2013] for further analysis).
2. At the time, Minister Mal Brough was the Federal Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.
3. Since 2007 the NTER has undergone some minor changes under the Rudd and Gillard governments. It now exists under the very similar Stronger Futures Policy which has maintained its key components.
4. Tennant Creek is regional town in the Northern Territory.
5. Canberra is the capital of Australia.

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