

The dominant ideology that colonised "Terra Australis" and went on to construct "Australia" was patriarchal. Describe how this gendered perspective is evident in works from Australia's past. Support your argument with reference to specific examples. Does such a view persist in the contemporary production of culture in Australia?

Introduction

The dominant ideology that colonised Terra Australis and subsequently Australia is a dominant ideology that prevails within Western society today. This ideology has not changed dramatically over the last 300 years. This ideology is based around notions of masculinity, superiority, capitalism, expansion and industrialisation which are inherently patriarchal traits.

Today's public audience is definitely more liberal and open to a wider range of ideas and views as expressed by an artist and are far more accommodating than colonial days. However, we do have a prevailing culture that is predominantly capitalist and capitalism is strongly grounded within a patriarchal discourse, which in turn is heavily influenced by masculine ideologies.

Western Culture as a Patriarchal Discourse

Western culture is deeply rooted in notions of patriarchal power and dominance, which have remained unchallenged for hundreds of years.

A major component of the patriarchal system is understanding the placement of the "other" within this discourse. Patriarchal ideology is based around an historical and cultural language devised and set by the "superiority" of the male other. Even in terms of feminism, the female other has replicated herself on the male other for recognition and status within a patriarchal discourse. (Grosz, 1988)

The beginnings of Western patriarchal culture can be dated back to the classical Greeks. At a time when great philosophers like Aristotle, Socrates and Plato held

great public voice - the "other" was given no real voice or platform from which to be heard. Indeed, Plato's thoughts are dominated by a patriarchal hierarchy. His paper on the new world would see "man" superior to all other beings. Plato states "he who has developed his male humanity and can participate in the highest functions of man, politics and war". (Elshtain 1973)

The Church has also played a strong role in the definition of a patriarchal society. Until recent times, the Church has been a major influence on society and culture, dictating the accepted roles of gender and representation within society, stringently upholding the divine rules of procreation and obedience and the reverence of civilised man above all else. (Weedon 1987)

The prevailing discourse of settlers and explorers to the new land of "Terra Australis" was that they were adding to, not displacing the local inhabitants. The colonists saw themselves and their ways of being as far superior and more civilised than the local savages and the Aborigines were treated accordingly.

Notions of modern Australia were heavily influenced and biased toward masculine modes of thought. In this period we see women and Aborigines as being marginalised, if not totally ignored. This in part was probably due to work that still needed to be done to establish a new country.

In Australia today, what we are more inclined to perceive, is a very superficial, politically correct democratic system, based around notions of equality for all marginalised groups eg ethnic races and gender groups. We have a legal system, that on face value, views all peoples as having equal rights and value within society. However, this system in essence does not always follow through on its promises. One only has to look at the Judge who stated "when a woman says no, she may mean yes" or that statistically, violence against women in this country is actually on the rise.

Kenan Malik views Western culture as still being inherently a patriarchal society, the "other" is still marginalised into a point of indifference. Under notions of multiculturalism, these differences have been embraced in a public sphere, giving all

minorities a public voice, temporarily alleviating any notions of inequality within the different minority groups. What this course of action does in actuality however, is further marginalise minority groups by expounding and highlighting cultural differences. Not only does it highlight differences between gender, peoples and cultures it nullifies any political statements these groups would like to make regarding their placement within society (Malik, 2002)

Colonial Artists and Public Discourse

In the beginning of colonisation, Australia or "Terra Australis" was seen as something of a novelty country by European nations. Australian history, from a Western discourse, really only starts at the time of settlement as a penal colony (Eagle, Johns 1994).

Even through such harsh beginnings, Australia was viewed as a substitute for a "home away from home" by many of the British citizens inhabiting our shores at that time. There was really only one way and that was the British way. If Australia did not have what they were missing from home, they would endow her with it. This is particularly evident in social codes and behaviour from that period (I couldn't imagine wearing all those items of clothing on a 40 degree day, living in a tent in the middle of the bush!!).

During the 1800s Western culture was heavily invested in all things rational. The importance of the Church had slightly diminished with the advent of new scientific discoveries and it is with these discoveries that society began to believe that perhaps they could actually get closer to God if they understood the world around them better. Objects and art were placed into a classificatory mode and high art became a study into natural history and topography. These things were seen as necessary and imperative for the betterment of a civilised and enlightened nation. It should also be remembered that the camera as we know it had yet to be invented, so there was a great emphasis placed on the artist to produce a replica or exact likeness of the image for educational and reference purposes. (Eagle, Jones 1994)

These images became a pictorial history of new lands discovered. In fact the dissemination of knowledge back to the homeland was so important that British officers were trained in the art of drawing so that they could compose a visual diary of their encounters and new findings. (Eagle, Johns 1994)

The British Government of the time was very keen to illicit settlers to their newly occupied territory and employed the services of artists to depict a visual documentary of the beauty and bountiful landscape to be found in the new land. These pictures, enticed the new settlers by depicting a land that was vaguely similar to the British landscape, of one not as alien and foreign as one might think.

Joseph Lycett was one such artist who imposed his own cultural codes and signifiers onto a newly discovered landscape. In 1824 he published a series of articles entitled "Views in Australia" to encourage more British settlement in Australia. (Eagle, Johns 1994). Lycett writes:

"Among all the various occurrences which constitute the history of human affairs, there are perhaps none calculated to excite such universal interest as the discovery of unknown countries, and the progress of art upon the soil and the people, which nature, on such occasions, resigns from her own creative hand to the care and culture of their civilised discoverers..."

In Lycett's painting (Annexure A) "The Sugarloaf Mountain near Newcastle" 1822 we see an almost surreal landscape. The brilliant rich greens and hues of blue depict a peaceful and serene land, one of accommodation and fertility. We see the Aboriginal people located in the background of the woods, peacefully going about their daily chores whilst the European influence is heavily imposed on the two men standing by the lake. Lycett uses sweeping hand gestures to suggest they are surveying the new territory, eager and willing to tame and master the landscape before them. Even the botany is more like an English park than a true Australian landscape. The trees are carefully painted into an almost topiary effect, portraying a sense of being tamed and contained as was popular with Victorian society of the time.

John W Lewin was another colonial artist, but unlike Lycett, he was a natural science draughtsman who was exceptional at replicating bird, plant life and history in the making. Indeed, his main interests were in the accurate depiction of the new territory and all that was contained therein. He spent a lifetime making sketches and drawings of both the habitat and the people located within to provide a factual documentary portfolio of those things to be found in the new territory. In his watercolour "The Opossum" 1807 (Annexure B) we see the infinite attention to detail provided in the work. His approach is one of scientific and analytical exploration of the subject matter at hand. (Eagle, Johns 1994)

Conrad Martens was a traditionally trained artist from England who arrived in Australia in 1835. His firm belief was that it was the artist's responsibility to work from nature in a controlled way, he stated "it is only through art that we learn to see nature correctly". His works were generally based on imperial aspirations and themes of grandeur, of civilised cultivation and the conquering of all that man surveyed. (Eagle, Johns 1994)

Martens' painting "Road Across the Mountains with Mount Tomah in the Distance, 1845" (Annexure C) is a classic example of romantic notions of space, beauty and untamed wilderness ready to be explored and had by any man brave enough to harness the vast empty landscape. His painting portrays a landscape of striking beauty and wilderness juxtaposed within a soft dreamy sky, inviting all dreamers and conquerors to the wilderness of the newly found Australian landscape.

In John Ayer's painting of "Sydney Harbour" 1808 (Annexure D) he makes a cursory illusion to the Aborigines who he places in the background, fenced out and contained by the might of British colonisation, civilisation and imperialism. At first glance, we would mistake the painting as being a totally British landscape with cultivated parklands. The marginalised other has no real place or meaning in this painting.

Piron's "Fishing Scene, Melville Island, Cape Van Dieman" (Annexure E) was surely drawn for the purposes of pleasing his Victorian audience. In this picture, we see a group of Aborigines displaced into a scene from ancient Greek or Roman days. They are portrayed in a classical fashion and demeanour, frolicking and enjoying the

water. Rather than portraying them as they would have appeared, they have been totally displaced with all relevant and true meaning as to their existence nullified and obliterated.

It is astonishing to see how the artists of the time endowed them with those qualities that the audience would recognise and align themselves with. Watling's "A view in Port Jackson "A woman meeting her Husband who had been out on some exploit and offering him some fish" (Annexure F) is a perfect example of patriarchal discourse. This scene is a typically stereo-typical scenario for a respectable Victorian family portrayed and placed onto an Aboriginal family.

Eugene von Guerard's "The Barwon River, Geelong 1854" (Annexure G) is another prime example of the discourse imposed on the natives of Australia. In this painting we see the Aboriginals dressed almost as biblical characters, swathed in cloth. The white men in the picture are offering goods to these people, showing themselves as being friendly and accommodating.

Robert Dowling's "Minjah, in the Old Time" (Annexure H) follows on in the same vain as Guerard's painting except that the Aboriginals are also endowed with European animals.

Benjamin Duterrau's "The Conciliation" (Annexure I) is a pertinent reminder of the power of the British propaganda machine. In his painting, we see an almost stereo-typical scene of nobleman meeting savage. As was popular with Victorian culture at the time, we have his faithful hound at his side, amongst the savages who appear pleased to meet the nobleman, honoured by his presence and eternally grateful.

S T Gill's cartoon "Native Dignity" (Annexure J) makes a mockery of the Aboriginal people and their inability to be seen as equals against a more civilised and educated white population.

Romantic Australian Landscapes

During the late 1880s and early 1900s a new discourse for Australian art was emerging. This discourse was heavily invested in writing a new script for the meaning of Australian identity and landscape. It was important that this script endowed the Australian identity with a truer, more meaningful discourse and removed itself from the shackles of British colonialism and iconography. (Adams, 2004)

This was in line with the emergence of a number of romantic Australian poets, who were able to capture the inherent beauty of the Australian landscape and the people who inhabited it, namely Banjo Patterson and Henry Lawson. (Adams, 2004)

From these fragile beginnings, a new Australian identity was slowly being borne. One that was based around masculine notions of mateship, humour, the sun, the land, hardwork and endearing strength of spirit and determination. The Heidelberg School was one such group of artists that felt a need to replace traditional notions of landscape with a new genre. The Australian landscape was shifted into a place of Australian pride and identity. There were of course other factors that played a role in the establishment of this new discourse, namely the desire for Australia to become a Federation and the impact of industrialisation on the Australian psyche. The landscape became a more powerful tool when trying to establish a new discourse based on the strength and character of both men and landscape as opposed to factories and towers of smoke billowing into the sky. (Adams, 2004)

The paintings of this period were very idealised. Labour is not seen as being hard work, rather it is almost revered as being an admirable and honourable pastime. In the art works of this period, there is no sense of despair, tiredness or discrimination - everyone is equal. Works of this time were biased toward a masculine discourse and very few women are depicted in the scenes from this period and if they are, they are only viewed in a passive sense, as an onlooker to the hard work that is being completed. (Adams, 2004)

Tom Robert's (1856-1931) works are predominantly of outback New South Wales and Tasmania. In nearly all of his works, he had a sense of grandeur, using size and placement to instil a sense of conquering, of hard work, one of pride and nationalism, a harsh landscape conquered. In his work "Farm, Mount Roland, Tasmania" (Annexure K) we see the paddocks cleared as a vast expanse of farming land with the formidable presence of Mount Roland overlooking the proceedings. The sky is clear and all is well. Paddocks are still to be cleared in the distance.

Tom Robert's "Threshing, Coolmoe, Tasmania" (Annexure L) is a painting of the determination and strength of the Australian farmer. Against overwhelming odds, the men work hard to bale the hay on a warm summer's day. We see the depiction of seemingly advanced machinery to aid them in their day's work, a sign of economic and technological advancement in the colony. Defining a new identity by the use of overwhelming size, adding to the fortitude and strength of spirit the men have in undertaking their day's work.

Hans Heysen's work "Summer" (Annexure M) shows the strength of the Australian spirit to pastoralise the land, amongst partially cleared ground on a very hot summer's day, the sheep walk through an alien landscape, displaced and yet surviving due to the dexterity and determination of the Australian farmer. The colours are muted, depicting the heat and stillness of the day.

Walter Withers "A Fallen Monarch, 1890" (Annexure N) depicts the Australian woodsman conquering a large gum in isolation - he will not fail. The title of the painting would suggest that Withers was very interested in rebuilding the Australian landscape without interference from a British monarchy.

In nearly all of these paintings, the image of woman is missing. She does not have a place in a land that is still to be fully conquered - that is the responsibility of the men and as such the men take on roles of heroism and strength against seemingly insurmountable odds. The women's role is diminished as being unimportant and of no consequence to the taming of the land or the building of a nation - her place is in the home looking after the children.

Contemporary Artists and Public Discourse

In today's post-modern society, the artist has taken on the role of shifting and challenging preconceived notions of traditional narratives and themes. What we are faced with is an individual response to widely accepted social signifiers and cultural norms within society.

It is however, my personal belief that whilst the artist may have licence in today's society to construct their own narrative on society or personal viewpoints, the acceptance of these thoughts and views by the general public is only marginal. This is in part due to the impact of mass advertising and popular television on the public. In these forums, the general foundation stones of Western discourse, whilst dramatically changed on the surface, is grounded in the same fears and prejudices that has encumbered Western civilisation for hundreds of years.

Conclusion

In researching this essay, it was very hard to move away from the treatment of the Aboriginal people under British colonisation. Whilst there was also a heavy emphasis placed on the portrayal of landscape albeit in a quasi British fashion, for me personally, it was upsetting to view the portrayal of the displaced Aboriginal people.

In the majority of instances, they had been robbed of their culture, dignity, individuality and birth right to be depicted and portrayed against those cultural codes and signifiers of Western discourse that the public could understand and associate themselves with. A very narrow and limited view of an enlightened period of Western history.

Modern Australian art, in particular Australian landscape, totally ignored the placement of Aboriginal people (along with other marginalised groups) within it. Even though the artists of the time tried exceptionally hard to instil a new sense of Australian identity, it was very definitely a white male identity. Prevailing politics of

the time had a strong and vested interest in totally obliterating the Aboriginal equation from the history books.

In actuality, when viewed against colonial art, even though Aboriginals were placed into the marginalised category of the "other", there was still representation of their presence, albeit manipulated. In fact, when researching early documentation on the first settlers to Australia, some spoke quite fondly and kindly of a race of people that were not aggressive and as formidable as some other "natives" from other countries.

When we look at the Australian artists of the late 1800s and early 1900s, there was an absolute preoccupation with the strength of white Australia and its accomplishments. Its ability to build and inspire a nation from nothing. History tells us that the Government of the time, proceeded to move onto policies such as the "White Australia Policy".

It is no surprise then, that the placement of women within this discourse would also be limited (if depicted at all). A harsh landscape, ready to be cultivated and pastoralised was no place for a lady, this was a man's job and only a real man could undertake same - one of strong character and steely determination not to fail to the task at hand.

If asked whether Australian culture is still biased by a gendered perspective, I would have to say yes. We only need to refer to the statistics to see that more women go through art school than men and yet, male art is still a dominating factor on current art markets. The Australian Bureau of Statistics still apportions the majority of wealth to men, women make up only a small percentage of higher paid labour undertaken in this country. Indeed, even higher education placements are biased towards men, with the majority of University lecturers male.

To summarise, I believe marginalised groups in Western society have been paid "lip service" to elicit a quiet sense of contentment and peace within society. However, the real impact of this lip service is a culture that is inherently unmoving and unchanging, deeply rooted in notions of masculine and white superiority.

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