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Response to Robert Aldrich's Review of **Alice Bullard**, *Exile to Paradise: Savagery and Civilization in Paris and the South Pacific, 1790-1900*.

By Alice Bullard, Georgia Institute of Technology.

Perhaps Robert Aldrich expects an old-fashion political history from a book that studies French ideas and policies from an intellectual history and post-colonial perspective. Aldrich misrepresents my intent in portraying the "savagery" of the Kanak and Paris Communards within one book. He ignores the role "civilization" plays in my book. Finally, he fails to acknowledge the extensive discussions of gender in the text. In sum, his review resolutely resists engagement with my book.

Political Savages and Natural Savages

The first major misreading by Aldrich is his assertion that my main thesis is that the Kanak and the Communards opposed French civilization in substantially the same ways; his phrase is "*même combat*". In the first pages of Chapter One, I establish a clear distinction between so-called political savages and so-called natural savages (p.10). This distinction is maintained throughout the book. For example, Chapter Six examines at length why the French authorities thought the "savage" Communards would be moralized by contact with the New Caledonian land, when clearly the "natural savages" who had lived there for thousands of years had escaped that allegedly moralizing influence. This argument, however, is curiously absent from Aldrich's review.

A series of errors and misrepresentations follow from Aldrich's neglect of my book's thesis. Aldrich presumes that "savagery" and "civilization" are rigid categories into which I force my material, but in my treatment they are recognized primarily as highly malleable rhetorical and discursive devices. As early as page 2, I comment on the permeability of the terms. Chapter One is a historical overview, from the late eighteenth century to the 1860s, of changes in the meanings of "civilization" and "savagery." It is here, in the context of a debate staged by Paul Broca, that the broadly inclusive definition of civilization advocated by many anthropologists was rejected, and France was set-up as "the gold standard" (p.27). Chapter Three portrays an all out battle for control over the meanings of "civilization" and "savagery." As we can see, these were, in the nineteenth century, anything but static categories.

Aldrich further complains I focus on the Communards, when they are, indeed a chief focal point of my research. However, I did not rely solely on records about or by the Communards for my depiction of the Kanak, as Aldrich contends. This is clear to anyone who looks at my notes and bibliography. In a misguided interpretation, he implies that the point of Chapter Seven, "Fatal Nostalgia," is to explain why the Communards did not side with the Kanak rebels in 1878. In fact, Chapter Seven is a politically

situated interpretation of the psycho-dynamics of nostalgia among the deported. Presented as a lecture in Australia, Chapter Seven moved some audience members to tears; it is perhaps the strongest chapter in the book.

Aldrich objects to the seeming contradiction between the French rhetoric about “ugly” Kanak women and their willingness to take-up sexual and domestic relationships with them. This complaint overlooks my discussion of the “myth of the ugly Melanesians” (pp.50-53). It also overlooks the power of sexual hunger to overcome myriad inhibitions.

Civilization

Aldrich does not consider the full thesis of my book, which is that in colonizing New Caledonia and in overcoming the Paris Commune, clinging to the moral ideal of civilization gave a sense of meaning and historical direction to the French nation. Civilization bridged the torrent of change that constituted modernity, and a key plank in this bridge was “morality.” If “civilization” expressed the moral ideals of French politicians and political theorists, “savagery” expressed the counter-point. Civilization was the positive dialectic, savagery the negative. The book works by exploring both terms and their interactions. The conclusion portrays a new “synthesis” in which an improved, although not optimal, relation between civilization and savagery was achieved.

From Chapter One through the conclusion, an historical arc is charted that marks the development from a Catholic morality, through a largely secular, Neo-Kantian morality advanced by Charles Renouvier, to a non-anthropocentric art of rational morality theorized by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl in the early twentieth century. With this non-anthropocentric art of rational morality a newly inclusive tactic toward the “savage” had arrived (see the Conclusion for complete discussion).

Chapter Four, which Aldrich judges to be irrelevant, delves into the question, just what was the philosophy of civilization and the “civilized” person in the early years of the Third Republic? What were the expectations for the proper subject? How did “civilization” confront and overcome “the void”? In the philosophy of Renouvier, a man frequently cited as among the most influential of nineteenth-century philosophers, we discover that without proper affect (or emotion), the self would not cohere (pp.110-112). Any deviation from “proper affect,” according to Renouvier’s strict view of moral law, was sinful. It is this inflexible moral outlook that prompted him to describe savages as the descendants of criminals. Armed with the understanding of the role of “correct emotions” in constituting the “civilized” subject, the book returns to an examination of the so-called savages. Renouvier’s philosophy is especially helpful in untangling the peculiar defects the French often attributed to the Kanak (discussed in Chapter Six). Renouvier also deepens our understanding of the disease that killed so many of the deported Communards, fatal nostalgia (Chapter Seven). Finally, the conclusion to *Exile to Paradise* hinges on the historical development from Renouvier’s Neo-Kantian morality to Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl’s ability to perceive and appreciate radically different affect.

My training as an intellectual historian is clear from the thesis of this book. However, like the scholarship of other feminist and post-colonial scholars, my history of ideas is both situated and embodied. By opening up the question what or who is “civilized,” I aim to reintegrate the rejoinders of the so-called savages, and the lability of “savagery” and “civilization” in moments of political upheaval,

into our historical understanding. I do this in order to broaden our view of the possibilities of “civilization” and to cultivate an appreciation for the voices of the “savages”.

Gender and the Civilizing Process

Gender in relationship to civilization is such a powerful and complex historical topic that it fully merits its own monographs. However, while maintaining my book’s focus on civilization and savagery, rather than civilization and gender, I integrated many details and observations concerning gender difference. Substantial sections in Chapters Three and Five look at the gendered dimensions to the Paris Commune and to the French presence in New Caledonia. Chapter Eight (“Hybridity or Humanitarianism,” the Chapter title Aldrich belittles) hinges on the distinctions between Kanak women and Kanak men as they confront the French colonial presence. Moreover, I also consider the gendered implications of Renouvier’s philosophy of the civilized subject (p.114).^[1]

My discussion of gender in the Paris Commune contributes to the venerable scholarship of Edith Thomas and the more recent book, *The Unruly Women of Paris*, by Gay Gullickson. French female “savages”—because as women they were already officially excluded from the political—could challenge civilization more deeply than their male counterparts. This is the case with Louise Michel, for example. Her views of the Kanak and her criticisms of French civilization seem to gain momentum from her already marginal position as a radical woman (pp.161-162 and 201-202). However, as I discuss in the book’s conclusion, her views of the Kanak were also limited by her historical and cultural location.

Chapter Five, in describing the living conditions of the deported Communards, brings into focus the plight of 4,500 men deported along with only 12 women. The demoralization of the solitary men worried colonial officials, prompting them to develop a family reconstitution plan, and heightened the mortality rates among prisoners—frequently death was provoked by severe depression and homesickness (“nostalgia” to use the medical terminology of the day).

Chapter Five considers as well gendered French attitudes and relationships with the Kanak. In a long analysis of a novel by Charles Malato, the failed attempt of a deported Communist to integrate into a Kanak tribe is contrasted to the more radical and more successful efforts of two French women. For both the French man and the French women, cultural integration is pursued through sexual relationships, but the French man is rejected by the tribe while the women are celebrated. Malato’s hero, June, is horrified by the actions of these newly savage French women (one calls herself “Marie, *la popinée blanche*”) (pp.149-160). Once again, these French women who reject civilization appear to do so more radically than the French man.

“Hybridity or Humanitarianism,” Chapter Eight, considers how the French claim to a “racial conquest” of New Caledonia was built through systematic omission in public representations of the highly gendered hybridity of the colonial population. Kanak women joined French men in conjugal unions. Kanak men, meanwhile, pursued their own limited integration into the colonial milieu by serving in the native police force and by joining an alliance in 1878 against the rebellious Kanak clans.

Chapter Eight contrasts these facts of deeply gendered hybridity with the prominence of the racialized representations of the Kanak both in popular venues, such as the Universal Expositions, and in

humanitarian tracts that campaigned for a defense of Kanak human rights. Aldrich is correct that my observation about the racist dimension the humanitarian tracts does not exhaust the analysis. Rather, the observation connects into my larger argument about a continued emphasis on racial difference despite strong currents of mixing in the colony. Granting historical recognition to the deeply gendered nature of the colonial hybridity, I argue, marks the route to a history that looks beyond the specter of “racial conquest” to the realities of mixed marriages and mixed loyalties within these islands.

My Sources and Citations

Aldrich first commends my bibliography, then says its lengthiness and my notes betray an under-revised dissertation, then suggests other books I might have included in it. It is difficult to answer such contrary observations. Perhaps it is helpful for me to point out that, eschewing the new, commercial model for academic publishing, I explicitly looked for a press that would allow a lengthy (although not infinite) bibliography. I hope other scholars will benefit from it. Of the ten chapters in this book, three appeared in my dissertation. My footnotes are condensed, with usually no more than one note per paragraph. Compared with other recent books in French history, my 33 pages of notes for 290 pages of text meet the norm.

NOTES

[1] I have continued to work on gendering the civilizing process in an essay, “Le théâtre des plages en Nouvelle-Calédonie: La Présentation du corps et l’art kanak féministe,” *Journal de la société des océanistes* 108:1 (1999): 133-143.

Alice Bullard
Georgia Institute of Technology
alice.bullard@hts.gatech.edu

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