

On the Sacred Clay of Botany Bay: Landings, National Memorialization, and Multiple Sovereignties

by ANN MCGRATH (Australian National University)

Abstract

To mark the federation of the Australian colonies in January 1901, a re-enactment of the landing of British navigator Captain James Cook was performed at Botany Bay, New South Wales. This involved not only the arrival of Cook's 'discovery' party ashore, but also a violent conflict with the local Gweagal/Dharawal people. The Landing Play brought together costumed professional actors and a troupe of Aboriginal performers from many parts of Australia. As indelible as the Cook landing story may seem as a foundational narrative replete with British flag raising performances, Australia's national story has never been entirely unified, homogenous or settled. Spectacularly adorned in animal skins and bird feathers, the Indigenous troupe used sacred white clay to paint their faces and bodies in distinctive designs, signifying the deep history narratives of their respective Indigenous nations. Both the European and Indigenous Australian actors re-enacted histories associated with their respective ancestral heroes on lands they deemed sacred. These contested performances of sovereignty, of 'landings' and of history, were mutually witnessed and in conversation with each other. Yet, while contemporary politicians and elites were reifying Captain Cook's legacy, much of the general audience ignored expectations, invading the VIP tent and cheering not the pompous Captain Cook oratory, but the Aboriginal actors who charged and attacked Cook's party. A Maori Native Affairs Minister from New Zealand and three Maori chiefs watched the 1901 spectacle. In contrast to the Indigenous recognition enjoyed in neighboring New Zealand, the Australian government today continues to resist a constitutionally recognised Indigenous advisory body, let alone to discuss discrete parliamentary representation or a Treaty. Yet then, as now, multiple parallel sovereignties and their sacred histories continue to be enacted and re-enacted across the Australian continent..

Keywords: memorialization, landing, re-enactment, Indigenous sovereignty, Botany Bay, Australia, Captain Cook, sacred places, nationalism, violent conflict, Colonialism

On the first of January 1901, after a peaceful but drawn out debate and negotiation process, the six Australian colonies federated into a nation. Queen Victoria signed the papers that authorised the Constitution of the new Commonwealth of Australia. Representatives from across the continent and the world came together to witness festivities to mark the beginning of the new nation. Suitable foundation narratives had to be invented and enacted. After all, a scattered population had to be transformed into a 'senti-

mental nation' united by common feeling (Hirst 2000). By 1901, that liminal national identity was in full flight. New historical imaginings, set in particular sites in the landscape, promised to bridge conflicting local, national and imperial agendas and identities. Ancestral heroes had been selected, and their actions positioned upon symbolic grounds of entitlement.

Along the white sandy beaches and the clayey hinterlands of Botany Bay, on the seventh of January in 1901, the new nation's first histori-

cal re-enactment was about to take place. It was *The Landing of Lieutenant James Cook, R.N. at Botany Bay, 1770* (Gapps 2000:112). Despite concerted efforts to inscribe a unifying, homogeneous plotline, those attending the events participated in competing visions of the national past and future. On a continent that shared multiple, complex and contested sovereignties,¹ Botany Bay had long been a meeting place of contingent histories (Nugent 2005).

This article explores how diverse performers and audiences engaged in an interpretation of the 'discovery moment' in surprising ways. In the theatre of *plein air*, unpredictable things happened. The formal Landing script is examined in the light of nationalist agendas, then we will consider what actually took place on the day between various participants – including politicians, dignitaries, diverse actors and audience members. Of particular interest is how the Indigenous Australian troupe played a key role, creating a multi-layered performance of nation. Their presence alone, with muscular physiques and Australian ornamentations on display, undermined any singular rendition of a British 'great man' narrative. Beyond binary questions of whether the Aboriginal performers were captives or agents (Poignant 2004; Taylor 2003), I consider the affective nature of their performances (Edmonds 2016) and what they brought with them. Tangible and intangible, what was that repertoire? In what ways did the live performances of the Landing Play and its audiences disrupt a singular patriotic reading of Australia's national sovereignty and history?

Landings

The outdoor re-enactment of the Captain Cook landing scene was to be the highlight of the nation's inaugural celebrations. Two sets of actors were required for the performance – a landing and a landed group. Leading the land-

ing group ashore in a small dinghy, the Cook actor cut an impressively noble figure. He wore a gold-braided uniform with a blue cutaway coat, white knee breeches, silken hose and a gold-laced three-cornered hat. Actors playing the British scientist Joseph Banks and the Swedish naturalist and Linnaean acolyte Dr Daniel Solander wore more muted costumes, though Banks' aristocratic status was indicated by finer cloth and golden ornamentation. A band of men in marine uniforms paced up and down, carrying antique muskets. According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the cast of sailors lolled around looking like they were out of a scene from the *Pirates of Penzance* (SMH 8 Jan: 5). An actor from a local Comedy company played Tupia, the voyage's navigator, artist and mapmaker from Raiatea, Society Islands (Thomas: 2010). His was an intermediary role: to attempt communication with and to offer European trade goods to the Aboriginal group.

The already-landed group comprised twenty-five Aboriginal men who had travelled from Queensland, the state adjoining the northern border of New South Wales and extending in the far tropical north to the Torres Straits. At first hidden from the crowd by thick bushes, the Aboriginal troupe applied clay and ochres to their torsos, arms and faces. Then, armed with fifteen-foot-long barbed spears, nullah nullahs, boomerangs and woomerahs, they suddenly appeared, charging down the hill, yelling loudly and holding their spears high, ready to throw. Spectacular in fine possum skins, the feathers and wings of parrots, cassowary, emu, galahs, black and white cockatoos, they wore neckpieces of kangaroo teeth and nautilus shells. Beneath their human hair waistbands were 'Siberian trunks' for modesty (Meston to Under Secy, Queensland, 15 Jan 1901).

The *Australasian* wryly captioned its photo: 'Queensland Aboriginals in Full War Paint: Captain Cook's Reception Committee'. As one newspaper reported, the Aboriginal men looked 'marvelously picturesque and warlike, and would be ugly customers to meet in a hand-to-hand fight'

¹ Aboriginal Australia comprised hundreds of distinctive landed and linguistically distinct groups that they understood as governing entities, polities or nations. For a discussion of why the term 'nation' is helpful see McGrath 2015; for useful discussions of Indigenous sovereignty, see Moreton-Robinson 2007.

(TSM 12 Jan 1901: 80). With athletic, powerful physiques, some were over 6 foot 4 inches tall. Their white clay and red ochre body paint, their agility, liveness and dramatic talents greatly impressed the audiences (Australasian 12 Jan 1901:26, The Mercury 10 Jan 1901:2). The plot-line of the 'landing' play was of mutual threat, attempted conciliation, then a violent exchange of fire and spears. After an Aboriginal man is wounded his group retreats. It is a stand-off. Unlike William Penn's much-mythologized story of the foundational settlement in North America, no treaty signing is involved.

Constituting a Nation

In mid 2017, the National Constitutional Convention of Aboriginal representatives at Uluru in Central Australia delivered a 'Statement from the Heart'. It demanded a treaty, a representative body to advise government, and a truthful telling of Australia's national history. It explained that their sovereignty was based upon spiritual ancestral ties with lands, in a continuum of ancestral time and trans-generational connection. The Statement proclaimed: "This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown. How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?" (National Constitutional Convention: 2017). In the geographic heart of the continent, Uluru is imbued with layers of sacredness for both white and Aboriginal Australia. Since the mid twentieth century, it has come to symbolize the wider Australian nation and its red centre. Previously known as Ayers Rock, the federal government handed ownership back to the Anangu people in 1985. Indigenous Australians celebrate it as a pan-Aboriginal meeting place of potent Indigenous ancestral song-lines and *Tjukurrpa* or 'law.'² Increasingly, it is also

viewed as a place of reconciliation between black and white Australia (McGrath 1991; 2015b).

Australian politicians reacted to the Statement from the Heart as if it was a radical plan. Yet, amongst most British colonies, including the United States, New Zealand and Canada, treaties had been negotiated. Australia was different; it was not conquered, but 'settled' – later argued to be on the legal basis of *terra nullius* – unoccupied or wasteland. As reflected in the 2017 Statement, Aboriginal Australians saw their sovereignty, or authority over land, as a sacred entitlement. They did not concur with European assumptions that it had been annulled by colonization. Their proposed treaty would be a *Makaratta*, a Yolgnu (eastern Arnhem Land) word for a process of reaching agreement after a conflict.

Although Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians alike proudly boast that Aborigines are the world's oldest continuing culture, historians have paid little attention to the deep human history of the continent. As if still caught up in the 1901 Landing Play, academic histories often begin in 1770 with the 'discovery' or in 1788 the 'first settlement'.

Under the federal Constitution of 1901, Aborigines were excluded from the Australian Census, so they were not counted amongst the people who would enjoy the benefits of the new Commonwealth. The states, not the federal government, retained authority over lands and over Aboriginal people. The colonies had introduced diverse legislation to ostensibly 'protect' Aboriginal people, which often meant tight surveillance, bureaucratic control and forced migration to 'Aboriginal reserves', which remained Crown Lands. Only after the nation-wide Referendum of 1967 did the Australian constitution comprehensively acknowledge Aboriginal people as citizens. In the 1970s, land rights legislation was introduced and in 1992 the High Court's Mabo judgment declared *terra nullius* a fiction, paving the way for greater Indigenous recognition and native title rights. Today, Aboriginal people still suffer discriminatory legislation and income controls. The trauma of their history runs deep, with

² For a discussion of 'song-line' and 'dreaming' conceptualizations, see Jones 2017: 21-30.

shocking ill health and incarceration rates (ABS 2016; McGrath 1995).

To the New Zealand's 1901 delegation that was amongst the audience watching the landing re-enactment, the 2017 Statement that called for a treaty and parliamentary representation would not have seemed radical at all. Representatives of the British Crown had signed the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. Although New Zealand had decided against joining the Commonwealth of Australia, they attended the Sydney celebrations in force. Their contingent included the Premier Mr Seddon, other Parliamentarians and three influential Maori chiefs, Ratana Ngahina, Nireaha Tamaki, Tamahau Mahupuku. In the preliminaries prior to the Landing re-enactment, James Carroll, Maori leader and first Minister for Native Affairs, made a formal speech. At an associated event aboard a large boat on the harbour, the contingent did the Haka, the impressive dance of war (TSM 12 Jan 1901:80; *The Australian Star*, 7 Jan 1901:3; Paterson 2013: 23).

The Maori delegation was interested in making comparisons. Minister Carroll observed that Aboriginal people spoke English much better than they did, so were well ahead in that way. In order to assess the men's character, strength and weaponry, the Maori Chiefs approached the Aboriginal performers as closely as possible. Mahupuku stated: "I judged that they seemed to be a hardy set of men, but as to their faces I was unable to see them, as they were all covered with some kind of paint, so I was unable to judge" (cited in Paterson 2013: 23).

Firstings

Settler-colonizer nations used stories of the 'first' landings by white men to mould homogenizing narratives of racial and gendered conformity. These eventually became the key tropes and motifs of settler-colonizer nationalism. Picture the Mayflower landing at Plymouth and William Penn's negotiation of a Treaty with Indians in Philadelphia. In Australia, it was Captain James Cook's landing at Botany Bay and Captain Philip and the First Fleet's landing at Port Jackson.

In turn, their main actors became the 'founding fathers' of nation. Re-enactments revisited and memorialized certain moments of people arriving in a certain place as appropriate 'beginning' points and sites for the new nations. The parcels of land where 'firsting' and/or pioneering events reportedly happened became associated with a special kind of historically endowed sacredness. This land gained exceptional status on the basis of past events that took place there.

As Ojibwa historian Jeani O'Brien demonstrated for the local histories of New England and the United States, if settler-pioneers are to claim 'firsting', an existing people must qualify for 'lasting' (O'Brien 2010). Commandeering the 1770 Cook Landing as the rupture or turning point that marked the commencement date of national history meant that the 'multiple and enduring' times of Indigenous Australia were contained (Schlunke 2013: 231-2; 2015). Underwritten by a New World narrative that relied upon the actions of European navigators, the Cook Landing story promised to displace the long *durée* of the continent's Aboriginal past.

Over most of the twentieth century, repeat performances, anniversary events, plaques, naming, history paintings, school texts, official histories and many other forms of interpretation and memorialization ensured that patriotic accounts of national days became ingrained in the collective psyche of white Australians (Healy 1997). After 1770, Captain Cook's journals soon became popular and remarked upon in both Europe and in Australia. By the mid nineteenth century, Cook imagery was featuring in Australian public events. John Gilfillan's 1859 painting 'Captain Cook taking Possession of NSW in Botany Bay, 1770'³ was printed in the *Illustrated Sydney News* in 1865 and several leading artists drew upon this image to create transparencies for public buildings and scenic backdrops (Callaway 2000:48). With the Duke of Edinburgh's visit

³ The painting was given other similar names, such as Possession of Botany Bay, Possession of the continent and so forth.

in 1868, the Lands Department featured a transparency of Britannia crowning Captain Cook with a laurel wreath (Callaway: 2000: 46). In 1879, a statue of Cook was erected in Sydney's Hyde Park (Gapps, 2000: 106). The following decade, newspapers issued special prints commemorating the moment of Cook's landing.

For many Indigenous students, these 'discovery dates' were a betrayal; history was telling them lies. To believe those school lessons was to distrust their loved ones and their epic stories of enduring connection. How else to explain the ancient Sydney rock engravings of giant stingrays, sharks, emus, star diagrams and the epic stories of heroic ancestors like Baiame, who arrived from the sky, and was widely known across the lands now known as New South Wales? Indigenous people had lived around the Botany Bay region for at least twelve thousand years; they were there when its ancient riverways cut off Kurnell, before the Bay took on the dimensions that Cook was to draw on his maps (OEH 2013).

By 1901, however, two Captains of the Royal Navy – Captain Cook and Captain Arthur Phillip, the first governor of the convict colony, shared a conflated origin story. The two became so fused in the Australian psyche that they were frequently mixed up or seen as one. Both men were mythologized and memorialized as ancestral heroes who 'gave birth to the nation' (Grimshaw et al 1994; Lake 2000; Gapps 2000:108-10). Cook's 'discovery' of Botany Bay and Phillip's 'first fleet' and 'first settlement' at Sydney Cove eighteen years later had another thing in common: landings on the south-eastern shores of the Australian continent, where the lands beyond had generated great wealth. The names of their ships also vied for hallowed status, with numerous replicas later built. In the 1901 re-enactment, an amateurishly painted 'Endeavour' sign on an old sailing boat had to suffice. Although his stay was short, the Cook landing was favoured over Phillip's, as its story less burdened with convict associations. Although a change was in the air, the convicts had not yet become fully romanticized ancestors.

Captain Cook Creates an Archive

Both Cook and Phillip were self-consciously 'making history' and crafting an archive to support it. In Cook's meticulously kept journals, he recorded calendar dates, technical data and measurements. He measured latitude and longitude and counted and recorded time in ways not previously known in this southern hemisphere land. He calculated the directions and speeds of winds and tides, and keenly mapped the coastlines; he observed 'natural history' – the storied science of the natural world. He knew that every word inscribed would be soon published and rapidly circulated amongst British elites.

During Cook's days at Botany Bay between late April to May 1770, he also recorded summaries of his encounters and skirmishes with the 'natives' and their 'dartts', which he had initially thought were poisoned. When it came to the sightings of geographical features, Cook used metaphors from the world he knew, paying the required homage to the authorities, to his patrons and their aristocratic networks (Carter 1987). Describing unfamiliar people was more difficult. Harder still was working out how to interact with them; he had no science for this.

When it came to asserting the sovereignty of the British Crown, in contrast Cook had a well-honed repertoire to follow. For settler colonizer states, key dates would later serve to reinforce ideas of sovereignty, Australian citizenship and belonging. After leaving Botany Bay, Cook soon realized he had omitted something important. So he added in his journal: 'During our stay in this Harbour I caused the English Colours to be display'd a shore every day and an inscription to be cut out upon ^{one} of the trees near the watering place setting forth the Ships name, date & C^a –' (Cook, 6 May 1770). In other words, in 1770, Cook's crew carved the tree trunks at Botany Bay with notations of the day, the month, the century and the ship that visited there from late April to early May. By flying the English flag and inscribing 'historical' details on the trees of Botany Bay, Captain Cook was asserting British sovereignty over this southern land. By transporting

his journal record back to England, he publicized each performative moment and useful observation; Cook's last entry expressed his compelling interest in the Bay's tides.

Through the sightings of the Endeavour crew, places were bestowed new names. In order to overlay British sovereignty, determining a fitting English name was important. Upon departing on the 6th May, Cook had decided on Stingray Harbour, inspired by the fish caught in their large seines. He also considered the bland name of 'Harbour Bay', though with the skirmishes, it was no harbour of peace. Inspired by Banks and Solander's exciting sightings and collection of many 'new' plants and animals – such as cockatoos, lorikeets, pelicans, waterbirds and a strange furred animal – Cook had proposed 'Botanist Bay'. Almost a week after the *Endeavour* sailed out, Cook finally decided upon its name. It would be 'Bottany Bay' or 'Botany Bay' (Cook; various entries, April-May 1770). Cook retrospectively amended his earlier journal entries accordingly. Perhaps the name had become a matter of group discussion and hot debate amongst himself and the botanists. Naming was a process Cook took seriously. Crucial to his navigational maps, naming was an art that would leave a lasting legacy. Cook chose something suitably melodic that lent itself to English rhyming (Nugent 2005), including, as it turned out, to many damning convict laments in the century to follow.⁴

As tangible proof of their travels, Cook's party also collected Aboriginal-made objects to be exported back to England. After the Gweagal/Dharawal men fled his musket fire, they grabbed spears from their encampment. As Cook put it: 'We found here a few Small hutts made of the bark of trees in one of which were four or five small children with whome we left some strings of beads &C^a a quantity of darts lay about the hutts these we took away with us'. In Joseph

Banks' Journal, he concurred: they: "threw into the house to them some beads, ribbands, cloths &c. as presents and went away". He added: "We however thought it no improper measure to take away with us all the lances which we could find about the houses, amounting in number to forty or fifty" (Cook 28-9 April 1770; Banks 1 May 1770). Considering the labour involved in crafting these essential hunting implements, this constituted a significant loss to their makers.

Despite the violent clash upon landing, Cook remained keen to investigate the resources of the lands beyond the beach in safety. On their Pacific travels to different islands, Cook had encountered people connected by common linguistic threads and cultural traditions. Depositing Pacific and European trade goods in Aboriginal camps – this time 'Cloth, Looking glasses, Combs, Beeds, Nails' – they made a second effort to start a negotiation or exchange process. However, their material 'conciliations', which included random thefts, failed. The decision of Cook's party to help themselves, removing equipment without permission, does not marry well with a conciliation process. Whether in the name of science or self-defence, Banks rationalized this with the half-hearted excuse of taking 'no improper measure'. They soon found that most of the wooden and resin 'lances' collected were fishing and hunting equipment rather than weaponry. On another occasion, the *Endeavour* crew helped themselves to large numbers of fish and to a cooked meal of oysters and mussels from a hastily vacated hearth site (Banks; Cook, 29 April 1770). Particularly surprising to them was that 'neither us nor Tupia could understand one word they said.' And, as Cook had lamented on the 30th April: 'All they seem'd to want was for us to be gone' (Cook: 29-30 April, 1 May).

Cook's Landing Spot Becomes Sacred

Leading up to Federation, Cook would be a trespasser no more. With Cook and Banks' journals to hand, in 1864, Thomas Holt of the Australian Patriotic Association had organised annual excursions to Botany Bay and in 1871 he instigated the

⁴ In December 1901 a controversy over the name broke out, with historian James Bonwick arguing that Captain Cook had not named the area Botany Bay, but rather it was his editor/annotator Hawkesworth (See *The Advertiser* 9 Dec 1901: 7).

erection of a stone monument at the landing site (Gapps 2000: 199). By 1899, Cook's landing place was to be carefully regulated. An agreed site was declared a public reserve named Captain Cook's Landing Place. At pains to justify the appropriation of private land for this national purpose, Joseph Carruthers, the New South Wales Minister for Lands, noted that local colonizers would no longer 'be *trespassers* when they visit this *sacred ground* [author's italics]' (Yarrington et.al. 1901:7).

At once, Botany Bay became a special category of land and of history. Cook himself was about to undergo an apotheosis. The New South Wales Minister for Works, E.W. Sullivan urged that the 'classic soil' on which Cook trod should be walked with the same reverence as 'the halls of Westminster Abbey' (SM 8 Jan 1901:5). His comparison was not with any ordinary Christian church. This was the venue for English coronations, the burial place of past Kings and Queens through the ages and the weddings intended to continue the royal line. Westminster Abbey was nothing less than a key site for performing English sovereignty – associated with church and state – not only with the Church of England but also with the Crown and Sovereign. Cook's landing site, too, was to do the spiritual and historical work of sovereignty.

A collusion involving state government Ministers responsible for Lands and Public Works, and intellectuals, scientists, the clergy, authors, artists and poets promoted the cult of Cook. Elite scholarly societies became actively engaged in his memorialization. The Philosophical Society, a local group promoting the study of science in Australia, with links to the local Royal and Linnæan societies (Chisholm 1976), erected a commemorative plaque at Botany Bay. Two visiting English Dukes planted a tree there to commemorate Cook's landing. Visiting Earls and overseas dignitaries were brought in to authorize and bless the national memory work of nation. By 1901, a towering cenotaph, fenced off for security and looking rather like the grave monument of a noteworthy, loomed nearby.

In 1901, the government printer published a booklet for the Botany Bay commemorations entitled: 'The Landing of Lieutenant James Cook, R.N. at Botany Bay'. It featured the Landing Play script, along with political speeches and historical notes. The booklet opened with a quote from acclaimed Australian poet Henry Kendall:

"Here, in the hour that shines and sounds afar,
Flamed first old England's banner like a star;
Here, in a time august with prayer and praise,
Was born the nation of these splendid days."

Unabashedly, this poem propounded a sacred claim to sovereignty based upon the arrival of the British flag and British feet – or at least footwear – at this site. The booklet included the speech by the Lieutenant Governor of New South Wales (NSW) which declared that Captain Cook had "set foot upon the spot we now stand on", hoisted the English flag and "took possession of the land for the Crown of England" (Yarrington et.al.1901: 9). The Minister for Lands summed up the key themes: 'In Praise of Captain Cook', 'Sacred Ground' and 'Breaking the Flag' (Yarrington et.al.1901: 5-7,13-15). In poems, speeches, paintings and imaginative recreations, this repertoire was to be repeated and this site was to be claimed many, many times.

A Nation Born of History

In the Landing play script, Cook's monologue ordains Australia as a rich and prosperous land, the equal of North America. In "voyages of old", Columbus "crossed the mighty main/To find an unknown World" (Yarrington et.al. 1901: 22). The playwright was clergyman and poet, W.H.H. Yarrington. Born at Norwich, England in 1872, he studied arts and law at University of Sydney, where he won a prize for a poem entitled: 'Cook, Meditating on Australia's Future'.⁵ In the Land-

⁵ Yarrington went on to write many other poems lauding white male pioneers, including 'Crossing the Mountains', 'The Antarctic Heroes', 'La Perouse Botany Bay', 'Matthew Flinders', plus sonnets and a religious poem that merged ideas of Aristotle's 'Ideal Perfection' with Christ, God and ideas of 'moral beau-

ing booklet published nearly three decades later, Yarrington's Cook continues his future forecasting:

"By Nations yet unborn this splendid hour,
With its events historic, yea, this spot
Which now we tread, shall e'er remembered be:-
Cherished as sacred in the annals bright
Of that New World which we this day have found".

Included in the Landing brochure, Australia's 'Commonwealth Hymn' was dedicated to the 'Great Father of the Universe' who had ordained "this Island Continent our own" (29). Cook's monologue also refers to Providence, a concept associated with the will of a Christian God and firmly entrenched in American memory.

That other, more established New World offered useful borrowings of grandeur and sacred entitlement. One politician described federation as "the greatest event, with the exception of the American declaration of Independence, in human history" (ATCJ 19 Jan 1901: 13). Unlike Americus, Captain Cook did not have a continent named after him, – so lamented the NSW Minister for Lands, but he would fix this by gazetting the land as a special category: "As the Plymouth Rock is the *most sacred ground* to the Americans, so may this *historic place, rich in its traditions*, be the one place in our island continent *more consecrated* than another to the *great man* who here first set foot upon our shores, and in his foresight secured for the empire, our country and our people, a territory unsurpassed in the whole universe!" (Yarrington et.al.1901:13). Sacred land, historic, the great man, first steps, territory, empire, foresight, traditions – it was to be a seamless identity narrative.

As Yarrington admitted, however, his Landing play took some liberty with the facts. On the one hand "[T]he whole representation would be as near as possible a true picture of the hoisting of the British flag on Australian soil over 100 years ago." Expressing a desire for historical accuracy,

ty'. (Yarrington, 1919; <https://www.austlit.edu.au/austlit/page/A35993> (accessed 17 Aug 17)

an "old union flag" was to be flown, as in 1770, Ireland had not yet joined the union (SMH 7 Jan: 8). However, in regard to the "formal act of taking possession", a "certain amount of poetic license" was taken because it "occurred some weeks after leaving Botany Bay" (Yarrington et.al. 1901; 21,16). Actually it was some months; Cook left Botany Bay in early May and did not make the proclamation until late August. The aptly named Possession Island was where, on behalf of King George III and the Empire, Cook declared possession of the east coast of Australia. Although the island was part of the Torres Straits in far north Queensland, even this state's *Brisbane Courier* uncritically referred to the Botany Bay flag- hoisting re-enactment as the "formal taking possession of the new land" (BC 8 Jan 1901:4).

Like Cook, Yarrington was well aware of the correct sequence by which the British had to take possession. For sovereignty to be recognized in the 'international law' of the European naval powers, it had to be physically performed, audibly declared and witnessed. Yarrington's Landing Play was imbued with legal and contractual meanings. Not only did it denote Cook's triumphal arrival after a long ocean journey, it also signalled a 'momentous' instance in law – the 'authorized' taking over land with colonizing potential by a European power. Sovereignty had been carefully dated and marked across many mediums and then repeatedly performed for posterity. Raising the flag signalled the gaining of considerable assets. Each flag raising and each speech was another reminder of the centrality of this act in the nation's foundation narrative. To some audiences, founding narratives read as clichéd exemplars of grand narrative traditions, while others hold them dearly. Cook's considerable achievements should not be overlooked, for he was an exemplary navigator on the high seas. However, in recognizing and respecting Indigenous peoples, he is not necessarily a good model of successful practice.

Popular Landing tropes have 'whitewashed' history in multiple ways, often effectively. They

downplay violence, and by associating whiteness with the future, with modernity, racial superiority and civilization, they repeatedly justify the displacement of Indigenous landowners. In proclaiming Cook's Landing Place, Lieutenant Governor Darley's speech urged: "that the Australian people may prove themselves to be worthy descendants of that race of which Captain Cook was so notable an example" (Yarrington et.al.,1901:11). Against such white pride, indigeneity was not awarded an inheritance; it was associated with the past, with barbarism and race inferiority.

Following Cook's journals, the Landing Play script had included Aboriginal women and children, with one woman in the key role of 'espying' the Endeavour (SMH 7 Jan 1901:7). Their omission from the later re-enactment was left unremarked. Although no white woman was present at the historic landing, in the Play, one female actor, Miss Lilian Bethel of the Hawtrey Comedy Company, appears.⁶ She "assumed the character of Australia, a nymph" (Yarrington, et.al. 1901). The allegory of a curvaceous, semi-robed woman to embody the nation had become a convention in North America and elsewhere, commonly used through the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Greek goddesses and their mythologies were borrowed to stand for the values of western civilization. As allegory for Australia, the Nymph was known as 'Hope', foretelling the future colony's material wealth and prosperity.⁷

The Landing play booklet was buttressed with a historical section written by the librarian and researcher F.M. Bladen. Humbly entitled '*Notes on the Discovery of Botany Bay*', its main content follows the fateful and anxious encounter between the British men and an unfamiliar local people. Broken up into chronological sub-sections, the longer chunk, *28th April, 1770* describes the human encounters: observations of smoke

from native fires and the clash between two different peoples and their weaponry. Bladen describes how when Cook fired at the legs of an Aboriginal man, the Indigenous people's spears and shields did not win out against his muskets.

At federation, Australian history did not exist as a distinctive field, but was subsumed under the history of the British Empire. The authors of the Landing pamphlet played founding roles in the study of a distinctive national history. Bladen, an archivist and librarian, was keen to preserve an archive of international quality for the new nation. In 1901, he helped found the Australian Historical Society (later the Royal Australian Historical Society), and in 1903 Yarrington became its President. This patriotic organisation, still going strong today, was founded to promote the noble memory of the founding fathers and other white male pioneers.

In this light, it is not surprising that Yarrington's Landing Play cast Aboriginal people as belonging not to 'history' but to an out of time state of "ignorance and sin". Via the monologue of Captain Cook, the "poor, dusky savages", who in their "native dwellings lowly stand", were destined to die out:

"As shadows flee before the dawn of day,
So the dark tribes of Earth I terror flee
Before the white man's ever onward tread."

The noble Cook is humane enough, however, to acknowledge those who "bravely" defended "their land" "Gainst our invading steps" (Yarrington et.al.1901: 26-7). Reflecting the 'doomed race' thinking of the day, Aboriginal people then exit the historical stage forever.

A United Nations, 1901

The twenty-five Aboriginal men who travelled to Sydney by train from Queensland included experienced performers (BC 1 Jan 1901:6; 3 Jan 1901:2). Some had previously worked with the organiser Archibald Meston, an entertainment entrepreneur who had staged a Wild Australia show along the lines of Buffalo Bill's Wild West. The troupe was representative of many Aborigi-

⁶ The talented 'Miss' Lilian Bethel left Sydney in 1904 to pursue a professional career in London (SMH 11 Feb 1904:7).

⁷ The author is preparing a longer piece on the Nymph Hope.

nal nations from south-east Queensland to the Gulf of Carpentaria. The 1901 Landing Play performers included men from Woodford in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, Caboolture north of Brisbane, and Fraser Island. Most resided on government gazetted Aboriginal reserves on the adjoining lands of the Gubbi Gubbi, Toorbul, Undambi, Dalla, the Butchilla and other peoples. Aboriginal people from tribal nations from all over Queensland were beginning to be concentrated on the lands of others. The group also included two men from South Australia – one from Sturt's Desert and one from the central region, and another from near Coolgardie in Western Australia (SMH 10 Jan 1901:5).⁸

While no representative body for Aboriginal people or discrete parliamentary representation was allowed in the new national Constitution, the visiting troupe comprised a kind of united nations. The irony was noticed by at least one Sydney journalist: 'In fact one might almost say that Mr. Meston has brought together *a federal representation of the blacks of the Australian continent*' (my italics; SMH: 10 January: 5).

Although Aboriginal residents had a continuing and growing presence at La Perouse and around Botany Bay, they were not invited to join the performance. Once sought for 'eye-witness' accounts (Nugent 2006), by now they were insufficiently 'authentic' – not 'real blacks' or 'black blacks' (TSM 19 Jan 1901:143). Sydney Aboriginal people spoke English well and were lighter skinned. Although they had long intermixed and intermarried amongst the newcomers, the newly

launched White Australia preferred to keep evidence of 'illicit love' across the colonizing boundaries as a national secret (McGrath 2015a). Nonetheless, local Aboriginal people attended and participated in the celebrations (Nugent 2015: 210-2; Argus 8 Jan 1901). Like the rest of the audience, they witnessed exciting mock battles, spectacular twirling and flaming boomerang throwing and other skilful displays.

Not all distant Indigenous nations were as remote from each other as might be presumed. Meston's Wild Australia troupe had performed in Sydney previously (McKay and Memmott 2016: 190). In the deep past, Indigenous marriage routes or song-lines extended from southern New South Wales coastal peoples all the way up to the southern Queensland coast. Many Indigenous nations had met up across vast distances at Bunya festivals, corroborees (dance festivals) and other large gatherings (See Connors 2015:ix, 60, 210). Trade goods, ritual objects, images, songs and news were exchanged over thousands of kilometres. Choreographed dances conveyed newcomer stories such as that of Captain Cook's stops along Queensland's northern coastline – at those places now known as 1770, Cooktown and Possession Island. Under restrictive colonial regimes, however, large gatherings were becoming increasingly difficult to hold in the old ways. Colonizer and native police violence and forcible removal onto reserves had pushed Queensland Aboriginal people onto 'sovereign lands' belonging to other Indigenous nations (McGrath 2015a). In order to survive these developments, Aboriginal leaders had had to expand and expedite strategies for communication and negotiation with Indigenous nations from afar.

Although not a complete Australia-wide representation, the modern Aboriginal troupe could be valuable emissaries for their own countries and nations. Their male and female elders would have played key roles in deciding who would go and who would not. Unfortunately writers continue to label the troupe as 'Meston's Aboriginals'. Certainly, Meston was the producer of their shows, but with Indigenous expertise at its core,

⁸ Their places of origin also included Warrego River, Fraser Island, Mount Esk, Booner (Boonah), Wilson River, Bulloo River, Paroo River, Murama Dundoo, Stradbroke Island, Logan River, Burnett River, Georgina River and Cooktown. The names of participants in the woomerah spear throwing exhibitions were also given – Tingeroo (warrego River) Narallie (Fraser Island), Joon Joon Binda (Mount Esk), Coogee Biah (boomer), Breeleeyama (Georgina River) and Purburree (Dundoo) (See SMH 10 Jan 1901 p 5). Photographer Kerry took "firelight photographs of the aborigines in warlike groups" (McKay 1998, 244). Members from further afield reflected Indigenous mobility occasioned by work in the pastoral and maritime industries.

the Aboriginal performers were co-directors and choreographers.

The male-only Aboriginal cast of 1901 meant that they were perceived as warriors – painted up, battle-ready, hostile, threatening, and thereby highlighting the bravery and kindness of white men. Given, however, that Aboriginal women and children were in the script of the Landing play, why were none included in the visiting troupe? In the late nineteenth century, frontier violence in the form of massacres and sexual exploitation by colonizers was so rife in Queensland that humanitarian calls for change could no longer be ignored. The 1897 Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act consequently aimed to segregate Aboriginal people from Asians and Europeans. Reserves were designed to prevent the mixed sexual and familial relations taking place on the ‘marital middle grounds’ of the Queensland frontier (McGrath: 2015a). Meston, who had contributed to the drafting of the 1897 Act, was now in the senior government position of Protector of Aborigines for the southern half of Queensland. Given his policies for ‘protection’ of Aboriginal women against the predations of white men, it would have been difficult for him to justify their travel.

We might expect that contemporary humanitarians would view the all-male 1901 troupe as conscripts – unhappy victims of Meston’s authoritarian personality and an oppressive colonizer regime.⁹ But the overall response of the general Sydney public was akin to what would be expected for an intercolonial delegation. According to the local papers, Queenslanders, too, were proud of how well their state’s men were going over in Sydney; they looked forward to their show impressing the Imperial troops when the group returned to Brisbane (BC Dec 4 1900:6). Of their statesmen, Meston reported to authorities that: ‘The Aborigines performed their duties to the satisfaction of the public and the press... and

were treated everywhere with all possible hospitality’ (SMH 10 Jan 1901: 5; Meston to Undersecretary, Queensland, 15 Jan 1901).

The politicians’ speeches at the Captain Cook site had emphasised a land ‘unstained by blood’ and ‘enjoyed in absolute peace’ (Yarrington et.al., 1901: 10-12). And although the Landing Play featured conciliation as well as conflict, there was no hedging around the fact that these ‘well-behaved’ Aboriginal representatives were to enact an emblematic story of violent confrontation. Charging with long spears, the Aboriginal troupe delivered a far more exciting performance for the audience than the Cook party actors, who, although professional actors, relied upon tedious speeches inaudible to most of the crowd (BC 12 Jan 1901: 7). Unless they stopped heckling the landing crew actors, one of the main organisers threatened to halt the show. Several newspapers were critical, describing the performance as a ‘historical farce’ with a real-life ‘farcical conclusion’ (TSM, 19 Jan 1901: 152; BC 12 Jan 1901:7). Sarcastically noting that NSW Premier Sir William Lyne was ‘not a Shakespeare’, the *Australian Town and Country Journal* criticized the “ridiculous dramatic re-enactment of Cook’s landing at Botany Bay”. Worse, the play took place in the “open glare of day, under the eyes of 5000 laughing sight seers” (ATCJ 19 Jan 1901:13). The dramatization of Cook’s arrival was referred to as ‘the joke’ and the politician’s speeches and toasts to the Queen were ridiculed.

In contrast, the acting ability of the Aboriginal men was repeatedly praised. In the scene when Cook’s shot hit an Aboriginal actor, he reportedly rolled around in a frighteningly convincing performance of shock and agony (Argus 8 January 1901:5). According to an article in Hobart’s *The Mercury* newspaper, the Aborigines took “an intelligent interest in their part of the show.” When they charged down the hill screeching, it was so convincing that the crowds fled, upsetting a photographer and “even the police disappeared temporarily” (10 Jan 1901:2). When the troupe unexpectedly took to the stage after their performance for an encore, they disrupted the

⁹ A team of researchers including Michael Aird, Paul Memmott and Maria Nugent started a new project on the Wild Australia show and their findings will offer deeper insights into the troupe.

formal itinerary, making a mockery of its pomp and ceremony. Again they stole the limelight from Captain Cook. A theatre academic summed it up: “The crowd cheered the mock battle charge of the Aborigine, who understood perfectly the theatrical nature of the re-enactment and at the conclusion disconcerted many by joining the other actors lined up behind Captain Cook to receive their share of the applause” (Fotheringham 2000: 136). Audiences noted the all-male troupe’s muscular physiques, height, athleticism and ability, and their high degree of professionalism. Indeed, the Aboriginal troupe stole the show.

Sacred Clay?

A *Sydney Mail* journalist offered a ‘backstage’ view of their preparations, describing: “a more interesting scene was taking place on the top of a small hill, and hidden from the public gaze by a clump of small bushes...They were busily engaged in putting the finishing touches to the war paint on their bodies. This was done by means of red and white ochres” (TSM, 19 Jan 1901:152). Although many of troupe’s props were imported from Queensland, there is no mention of any ochres in their long list of supplies (QSA COL/144-5 1900-1). As clay pits of these hues were located around Botany Bay, it is probable that they were applying accessible local clays, which would also lend historical precision. Captain Cook had remarked upon the many uses of the ‘white pigment’ or clay that the people used to adorn their bodies in the locality. Sought and traded across the wider region, the Gweagal people valued certain clays in pits at Kurnell and the vicinity as holding special ritual significance. (Cook, 6 May 1770; Nugent 2009; Schlunke 2015).

As part of the re-enactment, several of the 1901 dancers wore ochre designs with an uncanny semblance to antique British soldiers’ uniforms. These emulated Joseph Banks’s 1770 eyewitness account: ‘their bodies [were] painted with broad strokes drawn over their breasts and backs resembling much a soldiers cross belts, and their legs and thighs also with such like broad strokes drawn round them which imitated broad garters

or bracelets’ (Banks Journal 28 April 1770). For the Landing Play, numerous other configurations were also used, so labelling their body designs as ‘warpaint’ greatly oversimplified matters. Observers noted that their painted motifs were “as various as the tribes represented” (The Australasian 1901; TSM, 19 Jan 1901:152). When preparing for dance performances, Aboriginal people generally applied richly storied designs that signified personal and group identities associated with specific plants, animals and geographical features. Precious symbols represented epic ancestral journey stories of creation and connection known as Dreaming stories or song-lines, which linked and transmitted stories between different Indigenous nations across great tracts of land.

The Queensland troupe also wore more permanent badges of status.¹⁰ Cicatrices – large raised scars across torsos and upper arms – served as proof that men had been initiated through their ‘law’. Having passed through secret ceremonies, elders conferred them with senior authority over land and the sacred. As graduates in advanced Indigenous knowledge, they carried significant stories, songs and dances, and had important obligations. Just because the men were performing for largely white audiences did not mean that they stopped thinking according to learnt belief and value systems.

In January 1901, the charging, dancing feet of the Queensland visitors connected with the sand and clay of Botany Bay someone else’s ‘country’ or nation. As an embodied practice in a particular place, these shows took on multilayered cultural and historical meanings beyond simple entertainment. We do not know how much communication took place between local Botany Bay Aboriginal residents and the visiting Queenslanders. If the troupe had not sought their permission to dance there, the Gweagal/Dharawal people could have thought the dancers were attempting to extend a sacred hold over their lands. As the Aboriginal troupe was enacting a potentially

¹⁰ For example, Aborigines wrestling, NSW 7 January 1901; Accession No H20338/6 image no a13436 SLV.

dangerous performance on the land of strangers, to protect all concerned, the visitors had to follow the right protocols. In Indigenous belief systems, the magic of distant Aboriginal strangers could be threatening; distant places of origin and lengthy travels could enhance their powers. Consequently, local people could sicken or die or the country could be poisoned. We are left with many questions unanswered by the state archives and the contemporary newspapers. However, Indigenous dance inherently involved storytelling, re-enactment and association with specific landscapes. We therefore cannot exclude the possibility that the dances they developed and performed represented a storied exchange – ones especially designed to address the spirits and the nation upon whose lands they danced. Inevitably, the 1901 visitors were creating new connections with Gweagal/Dharawal country, and to an extent, sharing the power of their own deep history stories in conversation with those of white Australia. This is certainly what took place at La Perouse, Botany Bay during the 1988 Bicentennial of Phillip's Landing, with Aboriginal people from around Australia dancing out sacred sequences on Gweagal land.

Divided Nation

The 1901 public displays of nation at Botany Bay provided an opportunity to enact multiple sovereignties. British sovereignty benefited all of white Australia, but the Landing Play reinforced the knowledge that it was unequally shared. The largely white audiences consisted of at least 1000 invitees and over 4000 other women, men and children. The general audience did not behave according to plan. The Landing spot was difficult to keep clear for the Cook actor's arrival, as "policemen, politicians, pressmen, and photographers were mixed up with the aboriginal warriors of Australia" (*Mercury* 10 Jan: 2). During the day, the invited guests – parliamentarians, the visiting intercolonial representatives, aristocrats and other VIPs – were to have access to the best seats to view the Landing performance. These dignitaries were well covered in formal day wear

– the women in large netted hats and long white dresses gathered tight at the waist, the men in dark suits, white shirts and cream boater hats (TSM 19 Jan 1901:152). Wine, champagne and a large luncheon feast were provided in a comfortable timber and canvas pavilion luxuriantly decked out with white tablecloths, fine china and leafy table decorations.

Waiting in the hot summer sun for the show to begin, the general public were becoming fed up. To entertain themselves, they let off rockets, fire balloons and other fireworks and sent peculiar inflated objects into the sky. Then, suddenly, a mob stormed the roped-off VIP area, surging through to get the best viewing spots, while others grabbed meats and fine foods. One man who ran off with leftovers was seen gnawing at a massive turkey carcass. Others asked the waiters to serve them beverages and at least one may have succeeded. For when the actor playing Captain Cook finally arrived, one spectator offered him a whiskey and soda (TCJ, 19 Jan 1901:13; BC 12 Jan 1901:7).

Although the politician's speeches promoted the Lieutenant James Cook saga as a rags-to-riches story that evoked a New World land of opportunity (Yarrington et.al 1901: 9-10), the staging of the Landing performance reflected social and political hierarchies, including deference to British aristocrats. Cynical about syrupy prose and all the pomp and ceremony, the crowd's disorderly behaviour expressed an egalitarian, anti-authoritarian impulse. Their confidence in disobeying rules, despite a strong police presence, revealed that they enjoyed a strong sense of liberty.

For one thing, they were no longer convicts. By 1900, colonists were struggling to shake off the stigma of the convict past, with some demanding to change the name of Botany Bay, notoriously popularized in convict ditties. Lyne, the Premier of New South Wales retorted that few convicts were serious criminals, many having only shot a rabbit or pheasant (ST, 19 Aug 1900:7). But the evolving convict romance obscured the colonizing violence against Aboriginal people com-

mitted by colonizers across all classes (Griffiths 1987). Lyne himself had sheep farms in the frontier conflict zones of far north Queensland and the Riverina district of New South Wales (Cunneen 1986). In his birthplace, Tasmania, the Aboriginal population was decimated. For Aboriginal people in 1901, these frontier legacies, alongside continuing police surveillance, forced caution, including 'good behaviour' and speaking 'proper English' rather than their own languages at public events.¹¹

It must have been gratifying for the Aboriginal performers when the largely non-Aboriginal crowd excitedly applauded their mock-attack on Cook's party. The audience looked on appreciatively at the Aboriginal people, admiring their technical accomplishments, including precision spear throwing (SMH 9,10 Jan 1901:7, 5; BC 10 Jan 1901:5). Perhaps they were simply acknowledging their excellent showmanship and agility rather than necessarily siding with the underdogs. Nonetheless, the play had not been designed to encourage cheering and barracking for the Aboriginal side. The crowd's response contained hints of popular protest – at once directed against English heroes, snobbish aristocratic elites, and the politicians promoting their own glory.

Colonial audiences were diverse – in origin, class, gender, religion and more. Many of their traditions hailed from England, with its legacies of Anglo-Saxons, Romans and its evolving notions of 'civilization', with ideas of high culture often drawn from the ancient legends of Greece and Rome. Others, like many of the Irish, with their Celtic and Catholic traditions, were sceptical of everything English and Anglican. They boasted a history of rebellion, resenting aristocratic pretensions. There were multiple other ethnicities present, including people of mixed Aboriginal

descent, Scottish, Welsh, Europeans, Chinese and south east Asians.

Colonizers and politicians had divided views on who would receive the fair share of the nation's spoils. Nor had they been united on the politics of Federation. The Australian Republican movement was strong in the 1880s, being disrupted in part by the timing of the Boer War and the propaganda about loyalty to the English 'motherland'. Australian feminists, the suffragettes and women's advocates splintered over Federation. Some, like leading feminist Rose Scott, thought it would entrench male political power in an even more centralized arena. Other feminists lobbied for Federation as a way of introducing the women's vote beyond the two colonies that already enjoyed it (Lake 2000).

The status of all women as citizens and their relationship to sovereignty was confusing. Queen Victoria still sat on the throne, yet colonial women were virtually invisible in the performances of sovereignty. Englishmen did brave deeds and Aboriginal men resisted, and the one woman in the Landing performance was the actress who played the Nymph called Hope. While white women were struggling to obtain full citizenship, the only woman was cast in the role of an allegorical character standing on a rock. The nymph may have given men hope and some kind of thrill, but for Australian women, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, the nymph of nation offered an impossible role model and a hopeless symbolics. Feminists, still trying to find an equitable place for women in the new nation, must have despaired. What could possibly be done with this fantastical woman, alluringly inviting seamen to shore?

Multiple Histories

We have seen that the main show at Botany Bay haltingly attempted to launch a noble past. Australian national mythologies drew upon historical and sacred journey stories that started in a distant Europe. Oft repeated with differing scripts and casts in the years following, Landing Plays attempted to promote a homogenous image of a

¹¹ On the anniversary of Phillip's Landing in 1938, because local people refused, a group of Aboriginal people from a NSW reserve was forced to re-enact the landing scene. Aboriginal leaders staged a Day of Mourning in Australia Hall, Sydney, demanding citizenship rights and parliamentary representation.

white Australian nation. Cook's Landing became an action narrative that demarcated a 'beginning' of what was to come, with its modern/colonial conceptualization of historical time. In this sense, the Landing play aimed to memorialize a moment in which Indigenous history is stilled, becomes absent, and a new historical era is commenced (Schlunke 2015; 2013: 231-2). Although the VIP audience approved the Landing Play's hyperbolic patriotism, the general public was sceptical. Nor could Aboriginal people and their nations be fully 'contained', for they continued to enact sovereignty using old and new mediums, thereby expanding the circulation of landed narratives in important places and fostering a pan-continental Indigenous connectedness.

By contrast, the colonies were still novices at sharing a unified national sentiment. Some missing costumes used by the Aboriginal troupe created interstate tensions that escalated to the level of two state Premiers. Twenty-three 'opossum skins' valued at 2 pounds, 17 and sixpence were last seen at the Joseph Banks Botany Bay Hotel where the Aboriginal troupe had resided in January 1901. Two years later, the Premier of NSW wrote to the Premier of Qld about the disappearance of these 'hired' skins (Premier of NSW, 2 Feb 1903). Did Meston's son Harold swindle NSW out of a couple of pounds? Or had the Aboriginal troupe engaged in a trade of their own? While we may never know what became of them, possibly the troupe members decided that the skins were worth keeping, taking them back to Queensland in their luggage. After all, they had been given them to wear. Plus their distant Sydney provenance and their role in the ceremonies of the new nation imbued them with particular cultural value.

The Landing performance contained not only the seeds of consensus but also of dissent. It provided opportunities for the Aboriginal troupe to enact a form of sovereignty that went back into deep time. Like the Cook Landing story, Indigenous stories brought together epic narratives of ancestral heroes, and land-endowed ideas of the sacred that linked and in ways united the heri-

tage of many other nations. Their bodies daubed in ochres, and wearing the feathers and shells from Queensland rainforests, the 1901 Aboriginal troupe traded in deep histories of journeying.

In this light, the Indigenous performers represented a vital new engagement with national history telling. Dancing on Gweagal lands and wearing the sacred clay of Botany Bay on their bodies was transformative; as their feet connected with the earth, they recreated histories, creating binding new kin and land connections. In their embodied presence at Botany Bay, they inevitably carried their Law, with its deep land-based narratives. Their dancing added another layer to the sacredness of Botany Bay, further empowering local stories of the modern Australia that Indigenous Australians now shared.

Through their journeys, they opened up new highways of Aboriginal knowledge exchange and expedited knowledge transfer between multiple nations. They carried the sacred song-lines of their own nations to Dharawal country, thereby expanding their reach and strengthening their authority. In turn they took back the power of Dharawal land and its origin stories on their long return journey north. Via the routes of trains and steamers, song lines joined up. Via deeply embedded journey routes, some would connect the Botany Bay Cook stories of violent clash and land takeover with their own. At Botany Bay, that highly visible theatre of nation, Indigenous representatives thus challenged the notion of any straightforward noble 'beginning'. As Aboriginal men of the law, they enacted multiple agendas that had much less to do with European history than with narratives of their own deep transnational pasts.

Ever since, Aboriginal Australians on the east coast of Australia have creatively engaged with landing narratives, dismantling dominant foundational stories and crafting their own (Nugent 2005; 2009:105). The Gurindji people in the far north perform stories of Captain Cook as an immoral man destructive of the Dreaming (Hokari 2011). Indigenous artists have made Captain Cook paintings a popular genre. Paddy Wain-

burranga's entitled his 1988 ochre on bark painting 'Too Many Captain Cooks' (Nugent 2009:119). Gordon Bennett's powerful acrylics, influenced by Jackson Pollock, Mondrian and Basquiat, dismantled conciliatory tellings of the Cook legends. Other portraits portray Cook as a Pirate, complete with eye patch and a parrot on his shoulder (Nugent 2009, Plates 25-9). Numerous subversive critiques of Cook and Phillip's Landing narratives have emerged in performative genres – plays, dance, film and satirical television classics such as *BabaKiueria* (1986).¹²

As declared by the 2017 National Constitutional Convention that met in the heartland of Australia, the land is not ceded and its people remain undefeated. On sites of deep connection in the landscape, competing parties continue to re-enact sacred histories associated with ancestral heroes. Contested performances of sovereignty and of history are mutually witnessed and in conversation with each other. In each historical enactment, national stories are critiqued and evolve, incorporating new actors, stories, contests and connections. Captain Cook has become hero and anti-hero. Recently, certain Aboriginal representatives have campaigned for the British Museum to return a shield that Cook supposedly collected from Botany Bay. It shows what they believe are the markings of musket fire.¹³ At stake in this saga and in the 1901 re-enactment is the kind of history that recalls a past that, on behalf of all Australians, intervenes in the present and the future. The Cook Landing Play of January 1901 reverberates well beyond Botany Bay and Possession Island. Yet, as indelible as that landing story may seem, Australia's national story has never been entirely unified, homogenous or settled. Then, as now, multiple parallel sovereignties and their sacred histories continue to be enacted and re-enacted.

¹² Despite ongoing protests, the 26 January, the Landing Day of Governor Phillip and the convict ships at Sydney Cove, is still celebrated as Australia Day. After first arriving at Botany Bay, Phillip found it unsuitable and moved on to Port Jackson.

¹³ Its provenance remains unclear and evidence that Cook collected it is lacking.

References

Primary and Archival Sources

- The Australasian 1901. *A complete Pictorial Record of the Inauguration of the Commonwealth*. Sydney: Crown Studios.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS): Imprisonment Rates. 8.12.16 <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4517.0~2016~Main%20Features~Imprisonment%20rates~12Broome> (accessed Oct. 19, 2017).
- COOK, James. *Journals*, On-line Resource, National Library of Australia, April-May 1770, <http://southseas.nla.gov.au/journals/cook/17700506.html> (accessed Aug. 17, 2017).
- BANKS, Joseph, *The Endeavour journal of Joseph Banks, 1768-1771, entry for 28 April 1770*.
- MESTON Correspondence Files, 1901. Queensland State Archives.
COL/145 letter 526 of 1901.
COL/144 letter 2068, 1903; 1925 of 1900 and 19686 of 1900.
Premier of NSW to Premier of Queensland, 2 Feb 1903, ID 17982 Batch File 2068/1903.
ID17982 983- 526 and 1017/1901.
- State Library of Queensland* OM 90-63/10.
- NATIONAL CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION. *Statement from the Heart*. https://www.referendum-council.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru_Statement_From_The_Heart_0.PDF (accessed 17 August 2017).
- OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE (OEH) 2013: Botany Bay National Park (North and South) and Towra Point Nature Reserve <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=5061543> (accessed 25 October 2017).
- YARRINGTON, W.H.H. et.al., 1901. *The Landing of Lieutenant James Cook, R.N. at Botany Bay*, Sydney: W.A. Gullick, Government Printer.
- YARRINGTON, W.H.H. 1919. *Crossing the Mountains*, Sydney: Fuerth & Nal.

Newspapers – 1900-1901

- The Australian Star
The Australasian 1900
The Mercury
The Argus
The Sydney Mail & New South Wales Advertiser (TSM)
Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)
Sunday Times (ST)

- Brisbane Courier (BC)
Town and Country Journal (TCJ)
- Secondary Sources*
- CALLAWAY, A. 2000 *Visual Ephemera: Theatrical Art in Nineteenth-Century Australia*. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- CARTER, P. 1987. *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History*. London, Boston.
- CHISHOLM, A.H. 'Ramsay, Edward Pierson (1842-1916)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/ramsay-edward-pierson-4446/text7237> (accessed Oct 25, 2017).
- CONNORS, L. 2015. *Warrior: A Legendary Leader's Dramatic Life and Violent Death on the Colonial Frontier*. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.
- CUNNEEN, C. 1986. 'Lyne, Sir William John (1844-1913)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lyne-sir-william-john-7274/text12609> (accessed Oct. 25, 2017).
- EDMONDS, P. 2016 *Settler Colonialism and (Re)conciliation: Frontier Violence, Affective Performances and Imaginative Refoundings*. Houndmills: Palgrave.
- FOTHERINGHAM, R. 2000. "Theatre from 1788 to the 1960s" In *Companion to Australian Theatre*, edited by E. Webby. Cambridge: London.
- GAPPS, S, 2000. "Performing the Past: A Cultural History of Reenactments" (doctoral thesis, University of Technology, Sydney, 2002).
- GRIFFITHS, T. 1987. "Past Silences: Aborigines and Convicts in Our History- Making." *Australian Cultural History* 6 (1987): 18-32.
- GRIMSHAW, P. et al.1994. *Creating a Nation: A Feminist History of Australia*, Sydney: McPhee Gribble.
- HEALY, C. 1997. *From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory*. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- HIRST, J. 2000. *The Sentimental Nation: The Making of the Australian Commonwealth*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- HOKARI, M. 2011. *Gurindji Journey: A Japanese Historian in the Outback*, Honolulu: U Hawaii Press.
- JONES, P. 2017, "Beyond Songlines." *Australian Book Review* Sept 394: 21-30.
- LAKE, M. 2000. 'In the Interests of the Home': Rose Scott's Feminist Opposition to Federation." In *Makers of Miracles: The Cast of the Federation Story*, edited by D. Heaton and J. Williams. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- McKAY, J.M. 1998. "A Good Show: Colonial Queensland in International Exhibitions." *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum* 1:2.
- McGRATH, A. 1991. "Travels to a Distant Past: Mythologies of the Outback." *Australian Cultural History*, 10: 113-124.
- . ed. 1995. *Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines under the British Crown*. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin.
- . 2015a. *Illicit Love: Interracial Sex and Marriage in the United States and Australia*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska.
- . 2015b. "Conquering Sacred Grounds: Climbing Uluru and Mato Tipila". In *National Parks Beyond the Nation*, edited by A. Howkins and M. Fiege. Colorado: University of Oklahoma Press.
- McKAY, J 1998. "A Good Show: Colonial Queensland in international exhibitions." *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum*, 1:2.
- Mc KAY, J and MEMMOTT, P, 2016. "Staged Savagery: Archibald Meston and His Indigenous Exhibits." *Aboriginal History* 40: 181-203.
- MORETON-ROBINSON, A., ed. 2007. *Sovereign Subjects*. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin
- NUGENT, M. 2005. *Botany Bay: Where Histories Meet*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin
- . 2006. "Colonial Encounters: Aboriginal Testimony and Colonial Forms of Commemoration." *Aboriginal History*, 30.
- . 2009. *Captain Cook Was Here*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2015. "An Echo of that other cry: Reenacting Cook's Landing as Conciliation Event" In *Conciliation on Colonial Frontiers: Conflict, Performance, and Commemoration in Australia and the Pacific Rim*, edited by K. Darian-Smith and P. Edmonds. London: Routledge.
- O'BRIEN, J. M. 2010. *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England*. London: University of Minneapolis.
- PATERSON, L. 2013. "The similarity of hue constituted no special bond of intimacy between them: Close encounters of the indigenous kind." *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, 14: 19-40.
- POIGNANT, R. 2004. *Professional Savages: Captive Lives and Western Spectacle*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- SCHLUNKE, K. 2013. "One strange colonial thing: material remembering and the Bark Shield of Botany Bay." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 27(1): 18-29.
- . 2015. "Entertaining Possession: Re-enacting Cook's Arrival for the Queen" In *Conciliation on colonial frontiers: conflict, performance, and commemoration in Australia and in the Pacific Rim*, edited by K. Darian-Smith and P. Edmonds. New York: Routledge.
- TAYLOR, D. 2003. *The Archive and The Repertoire*. Durham: Duke.
- THOMAS, N. 2010. *Islanders: The Pacific in the Age of Empire*, Yale: New Haven.

Note on the Author

ANN MCGRATH is the 2017 Kathleen Fitzpatrick Laureate Fellow and Director of the Australian Centre for Indigenous History at the Australian National University. She has published numerous articles and books on gender, colonialism and most recently on deep history, and she has developed museum exhibitions, digital histories, films and television programs. Her first book was entitled *Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in Cattle Country* (Allen & Unwin 1987) and her most recent is *Illicit Love: Interracial Sex and Marriage in the United States and Australia* (U Nebraska 2015) which won the 2016 NSW Premiers History Award, General Category. She is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Social Sciences and the Academy of the Humanities and a Member of the Order of Australia.