Australian National Identity: Somewhere Between the Flags?

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Australian National Identity: Somewhere Between the Flags?

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Please note that this work includes images and names of deceased people that may cause distress to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
THESIS DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my Mother whose unfailing wish from the other side of the world was for me complete my work. As a result, for as long as possible she refrained from disclosing her illness to me. My Mother’s selfless act will stay with me forever. The completion of this work is therefore bittersweet, it is tinged with great sadness as well as great achievement.

In 2015, on what was to be my Mother’s 23rd and final visit to her ‘second’ home here in Australia, she found a quote which she felt resonated with my work and with great emotion she read it out loud,

    Australia is my birthplace but I cannot call it my own as well as my native land, for I have no right to live there. Until a treaty is agreed with the original inhabitants, I shall be homeless in the world (Germaine Greer qtd. in Cherry 2014: 53).

My Mother was truly remarkable.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to pay my respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this land and to the Elders, past, present and future. I acknowledge that the country upon which I work, travel and rest is Aboriginal land and I am grateful for having had the opportunity to embark upon this thesis journey.

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To my dear boys, my five sons of whom I am SO proud: Adam, Malcolm, Rufus, Jeremy, Philip. You have all been so supportive: kind, patient, understanding, helpful and interested. Your belief in me has never faltered and your kind consideration has always been to the fore. Thank you.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge how this work empowered me to critically evaluate my own identity. In my life male surnames had constructed my identity for half a century and for many years I accepted this naming ‘tradition’ without question. Over time however, the detrimental effects of being labelled with an identity to which I could not relate were palpable. The thesis gave me the confidence to instigate change ... but who was I to become? This was no easy task. After much deliberation it suddenly struck me that I just wanted to be ‘me’ and I was instantly released. I walked out of my local Births Deaths and Marriages Office absolutely liberated. I was my own person at last: Tracey Mee.
ABBREVIATIONS

AAL: Australian Aboriginal League
ABA: Australian Bicentennial Authority
ABC: Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACOSS: Australian Council of Social Service
AFN: Assembly of First Nations
AIATSIS: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ANFA: Australian National Flag Association
AOC: Australian Olympic Committee
APA: Aboriginal Progressive Association
AAPA: Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association
ATSIC: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
AWM: Australian War Memorial
FIAV: Federation Internationale des Associations Vexillologiques
FSA: Flag Society of Australia
ICV: International Congress of Vexillology
IOC: International Olympic Committee
MCA: Museum of Contemporary Art
MoAD: Museum of Australian Democracy
NBAN: Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations
NITV: National Indigenous Television
NMA: National Museum of Australia
NNTT: National Native Title Tribunal
NSW: New South Wales
RSL: Returned and Services League of Australia
SBS: Special Broadcasting Service
UMA: University of Melbourne Archives
UNIA: United Negro Improvement Association
ABSTRACT

The Australian national flag is the primary symbol of the nation. The flag produces and reproduces national identity through its presence in all spheres of the public domain. This thesis is an examination into the national flag’s representational force. It focuses on how the flag makes meaning in accordance with dominant discourses of nation and nationhood through an analysis of its uses and applications across a range of institutional sites. The thesis also takes into consideration the meaning-making potential of the national flag for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This work deploys a wide-range of historical and contemporary sources that include art and literary responses to the flag. The thesis also draws on a range of theoretical works on nation alongside the use of vexillology as a focused study of flags. A critique of the messages and meanings that the Australian national flag transmits raises important questions pertaining to the way the nation is constructed and maintained. While the thesis does not proffer a definitive solution to the many complexities surrounding Australian national identity, it offers the opportunity for further study as debates about changing the flag continue to circulate in the public sphere.
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CHAPTER ONE: Raise the National Standard

This land was never given up
This land was never bought or sold
The planting of the union jack
Never changed our law at all.¹

(Yothu Yindi with Peter Garret & Paul Kelly 1992).

Introduction

The above lyrics are from Treaty, a song composed in 1990 by Yothu Yindi in collaboration with musicians Peter Garrett and Paul Kelly (Corn 2009). These words reject the colonial authority of the British flag and demonstrate that Aboriginal people remain the sovereign owners of land that was never ceded or sold. The words of Treaty affirm that despite British colonisation, Aboriginal law has survived. Treaty was written in response to a broken promise by the Australian Government. The words of Treaty provide a fitting epigraph for this thesis; they categorically refute the signification of the Union Jack and Britain’s claim of sovereignty over Australia. In 1988, as the white nation celebrated two hundred years of British colonisation, Indigenous people publicly called for a treaty. In June 1988, then Prime Minister Bob Hawke attended the Barunga Festival in the Northern Territory where he was presented with a petition. The “Barunga Statement” as it became known, called for a treaty, land rights, self-determination, an end to discrimination, and the protection of Indigenous human rights. At the Barunga Festival Hawke promised, “[T]here shall be a treaty negotiated between the Aboriginal people and the Government on behalf of all the people of Australia” (qtd. in Brennan et al. 2005: 16). Hawke’s commitment to a treaty 30 years ago did not eventuate. The

¹ Lead singer of Yothu Yindi, Dr Mandawuy Yunupingu notes “[T]he intention of this song was to raise public awareness about this [the promise of a Treaty by 1990] so that the government would be encouraged hold to his promise. The song became a number-one hit, the first ever to be sung in a Yolngu language, and caught the public’s imagination. Though it borrows from rock ‘n’ roll, the whole structure of “Treaty” is driven by the beat of the djatpangarri that I’ve incorporated in it. It was an old recording of this historic djatpangarri that triggered the song’s composition. The man who originally created it was my gurr (maternal great-grandmother’s husband) and he passed away a long time ago in 1978. He was a real master of the djatpangarri style” (qtd. in Special Broadcasting Service [SBS] 2013).
Barunga Statement was later gifted to Parliament House in Canberra and is on permanent display as part of the parliamentary art collection. A public emblem of a broken promise.

This thesis is an inquiry into the socio-cultural effects and symbolism associated with the Australian national flag. The work will examine this primary symbol of national identity from a range of standpoints, and in particular, it will engage with Indigenous perspectives. In order to explore the bodies of knowledge which have emerged surrounding flag and nation, I draw from a diverse range of texts and contexts, from books, journal articles, theses, scholarly works and media reports that relate to the Australian nation and its flag, as well as the flag’s uses and applications in public and private domains. Indigenous sources are used whenever possible; not only as a means to challenge Western epistemology, but also as a way to garner knowledge, to provide a ‘balanced’ body of work and thus develop a greater understanding of the responses elicited by the Australian national flag.

The thesis embarks on this analysis with a view to critically evaluating the Australian flag, its origins, functional contexts, and its meaning-making potential, with an emphasis on the ways in which the nation’s most prominent symbol works to discursively produce and reproduce national identity. My questions are: how does the Australian national flag signify the nation given the placement of its colonial insignia, the Union Jack, in the flag’s upper left corner, and what are the effects of this signification on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people? In other words, what kind of nationalism is being created and maintained by the Australian flag and how is this nationalism received and understood by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in light of over two hundred years of colonisation marked by a continued lack of treaty/ies or constitutional inclusion?

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2 For this thesis I use the terms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or Indigenous people unless specifically writing about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people.
My research comes at a timely opportunity to contribute to discussions in the public domain which surround national identity and its associated symbols. Currently there are four former British colonies which retain the Union Jack on their national flag: Tuvalu, Fiji, New Zealand, and Australia. Both Fiji and New Zealand have recently reviewed the designs of their flags which, like Australia, feature the Union Jack in the top left hand corner. In 2014 former New Zealand Prime Minister, John Key, announced that New Zealanders would have the opportunity to change their national flag by a referendum. Key declared that the current national flag, “remains dominated by the Union Jack in a way that we ourselves are no longer dominated by the United Kingdom” and he urged New Zealanders to “take one more step in the evolution of modern New Zealand by acknowledging our independence through a new flag” (qtd. in Chapman 2014).

To begin the process of changing the flag a panel of twelve leaders from a variety of backgrounds was selected to represent a cross section of the New Zealand public. New Zealanders were then asked to identify core values they considered to be important. The top five values noted were freedom, history, equality, respect, and family. The public was then invited to submit and share alternative flag designs. Some 10,292 were received. From these the three most popular symbols were identified as the Southern Cross, Fern and Koru. The favourite five colours nominated were white, blue, red, black and green respectively. With these values, symbols and colours in mind the Flag Consideration Panel selected 40 flags to create an official long list.

The panel then spent ten weeks in consultation with the New Zealand public and in September 2015 a shortlist of five flags was announced. A subsequent binding postal

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3 The silver tree fern is found throughout New Zealand and is a widely recognised national symbol. The koru is an unfurling frond of the New Zealand silver fern. In Maori culture this is a significant symbol in that it represents new life, strength and perpetual growth.

4 This information was presented by Malcolm Mulholland, member of the New Zealand Flag Consideration Panel at the 26th International Congress of Vexillology (ICV 26), 31 August 2015.
referendum resulted in the Silver Fern flag being selected by the public as the official preferred alternative flag. In March 2016 New Zealanders voted in a second referendum to decide whether to keep their current national flag or endorse the preferred alternative. New Zealanders voted against changing their flag. 56.6 per cent of the 2.2 million voters chose to keep the current national flag. New Zealand’s process of selecting a flag by referenda stood in contrast to Fiji, where the decision rested with the government. 

In 2013, as part of its national renewal process, Fiji issued a new currency. The image of British Queen Elizabeth II had featured on Fiji’s currency since 1969 and was replaced with Fijian flora and fauna. Fiji’s interim Prime Minister, Frank Bainimarama, also announced that Fiji would change its flag. These measures were taken, “to reinforce a new Fijian identity and a new confidence in being Fijian on the global stage” (qtd. in Australian Broadcasting Corporation [ABC] News: 2013a). Bainimarama stated that the Union Jack on Fiji’s flag refers to a respected past but it has no place in the country’s evolution as a modern nation, “Fiji’s new flag should reflect its position in the world today, as a modern and truly independent nation-state” (qtd. in ABC News: 2015). At the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, Fiji won its first Olympic gold medal. Prime Minister Bainimarama was moved “to witness the way Fijians have rallied around the national flag as our Rugby Sevens team brought home Olympic gold for Fiji …” (qtd. in Ewart 2016). As a result the Fijian Government voted against changing the flag.

In Australia in 2010, a Morgan Gallup Poll found that 69% of 652 respondents aged over 14 answered ‘yes’ to the following question: “[S]hould the Union Jack remain in the Australian flag?” This figure was up 16% from a previous 1998 poll and according to the findings was at its highest since 1982 (Morgan 2010). These results indicate an ongoing attachment for the Union Jack which in turn suggests that the Union Jack has a significant bearing on Australia’s current perceptions of national identity. Executive Chairman “of Australia’s most highly regarded research company”, Gary Morgan “is often called upon to
provide political and social comment” (Morgan 2017). His analysis of the 2010 poll however, reveals a distinct bias,

[Despite recent unwarranted calls for a new Australian Flag, the Morgan Poll shows that the clear preference of Australians is to stick with the current design that was first flown on September 3, 1901 in Melbourne over the Australian Parliament and has so well represented our nation for over 100 years since (Morgan 2010).

In his evaluation Morgan, “whose clients include many of Australia’s leading companies, institutions and government departments” (Morgan 2017), is forthright in his assertion that the national flag in its current formation serves “our” nation well.

Ralph Kelly from the Flag Society of Australia (FSA / Flags Australia) states that proposals to change the national flag are rejected for two main reasons:

1) The status quo should endure because the case for change is not accepted.

2) The national flag is symbolic of the nation and it should be honoured without alteration (Flags Australia 2013).

Kelly explains that many proponents of the national flag make no distinction between flag and nation. The flag is a symbol of loyalty to Australia. Therefore, if the flag and nation are ‘imagined’ as one, it is not difficult to understand resistance to change. Currently much of the rhetoric which surrounds the flag is framed by comfortable terms of reference which speak of tradition, national sentiment, and values. Geoffrey Blainey, an influential historian noted for his conservative stance, claims that the national flag,

is the main symbol of national loyalty and national unity. It links the living and the dead. It is the only flag, in the history of the world, to command the loyalties of the people of an entire continent (2005: 131).
Blainey’s claims are not unfamiliar or unusual in the context of discussions about Australian nationalism. He espouses a view of nation that is both institutionally endorsed and embraced by many citizens. What is absent from these discussions are Indigenous perspectives. Therefore the task for this thesis is to investigate the discourses surrounding the national flag and to initiate possibilities for another way of ‘seeing’ or ‘re-viewing’ the national flag.

The Australian National Flag

![The Australian National Flag](Flags_Australia_2013.jpg)

Figure 1: The Australian National Flag (Flags Australia 2013).

The Union Jack is situated on the upper left-hand corner of the Australian national flag. Its position is significant. In vexillology, the upper left-hand corner is known as the canton and is the official point of honour for a flag. The upper left canton sits closest to the flagpole and thus, as the last part of the flag to ‘wear out’, occupies a position of privilege. The Union Jack is the term commonly used to refer to the Union flag of the United Kingdom. The term “Union Jack” dates from 1801 when the saltire of St Patrick of Ireland was added to the cross of St. Andrew of Scotland and the cross of England’s St. George. A saltire is diagonal cross whose arms extend to the edges of a flag or shield. Aside from the Union Jack, the rest of the

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5 The heraldic invisibility of Wales relates to its status. Wales has never been classified as a kingdom (Groom 2007).
Australian flag is known as the “field” and is charged with white stars. The Federation or Commonwealth Star sits directly beneath the Union Jack and points to the centre of the English red cross of St. George. On the fly, or right-hand side of the flag, there are five smaller stars to represent the constellation, *Crux Australis*, which is more commonly known as the Southern Cross, a constellation visible only in the skies of the southern hemisphere. The honoured section of the Australian flag belongs to the flag of Britain. In 1770, the British flag was used to take possession of the east coast of the continent.

**“Captain Cook”**

The British colonisation of Australia commenced on 29th April 1770 when Lieutenant James Cook⁶ sailed into Botany Bay, the country of the Gweagal and Bidjigal people of the Dharawal Eora nation. Frederick Wood notes that the Englishmen spent some time observing the local people, who were cooking fish, before a group rowed towards the shore. Resistance to the British was immediate, Wood explains, “[A]s they drew near, two natives seized their spears and prepared to resist the landing party … the natives threw their spears at the boats, and the Englishmen fired muskets” (1940: 27).

Once the party landed, Cook planted a flag on Kurnell’s Milgurrung Beach and wrote in his journal,

[D]uring my stay in this harbour I caused the English colours to be displayed on shore every day, and the ship’s name, and the date of the year to be inscribed upon one of the trees near the watering place (qtd. in Salt 2000: 19).

Cook’s words speak to his understanding of posterity as an enduring reminder of British colonial conquest. Today these colonial colours, the British red, white and blue remain a prevalent manifestation of Australian identity. The place where Cook first set foot on land is

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⁶ Cook becomes a Captain in 1772.
marked by an obelisk. In 1881 Prince Albert and Prince George visited the area and planted four pine trees. In 1970, the bicentenary of Cook’s landing, Queen Elizabeth visited the park which is now heritage-listed and known as “The Landing Place Reserve”. The significance of the royal imprimatur on the landing site of invading forces cannot be understated. The planting of trees signifies foundations, growing roots, in this instance, establishing foundations and a new beginning sanctioned and authorised by the highest order of British authority: the Crown. The final erasure of pre-colonial occupation is captured by the name: “The Landing Place Reserve”, a name connoting a place of “landing” that removes colonial violence from purview and produces imagery of a peaceful park where others simply “landed”, a memento of a moment of neutrality. Kurnell, the original site of Aboriginal dispossession is thus implanted with a flag, trees, and a name that erases all traces of pre and post invasion history.

Maria Nugent (2009) provides a detailed account of the eight days and nights Cook and his party spent around Kurnell. On the fourth day, a sailor, Forby Sutherland, died and became the first white man to be buried in Australian soil. Cook named the south point of the bay in the sailor’s memory.7 Sutherland was mythologised by nineteenth century colonial poets. Henry Kendall claimed that Sutherland’s grave was sacred and his body in the ground represented the start of settler Christian society. In 1825 Barron Field further cemented colonial claims of possession and legitimacy by arguing that Sutherland’s Christian burial was of greater import than the planting of the flag,

“… and thence a little space
Lies Sutherland, their shipmate; for the sound
Of Christian burial better did proclaim
Possession than the flag, in England’s name” (qtd. in Nugent 2009: 70).

7 Today Sutherland’s ‘Shire’ is home to nearly a quarter of a million people and covers some 369 Km² (Sutherland Shire Council 2017).
As the first white man to be buried, the dead sailor became, to borrow Nugent’s economic metaphor, a “holding deposit – a claim to the country until the colonists arrived” (Nugent 2009: 70). ‘Firsts’ matter in the construction of history. As a discursive form of reference ‘firsts’ mark the end of one era and the beginning of another. ‘Firsts’ also connect the colonists to the landscape and seemingly erase any traces of ‘others’ (Nugent 2009). Bruce Pascoe argues that prior to colonisation democracy was practiced in Australia, “more perfectly than anywhere on earth” (2007: 113). John Maynard substantiates this by drawing attention to some of Cook’s personal observations,

In a personal and highly revealing logbook account Cook reflected on the shocking inequality of living conditions in Britain, where raw sewage flowed through the streets, filth and disease was rampant and opportunities of bettering oneself were largely discouraged. In stark contrast Cook observed Aboriginal Australia as being a healthy paradise of equality (2014a: 16).

Maynard claims that Cook’s reflections have been largely ignored by historians. Bain Attwood proffers a reason for this, “History was not only the colonisers’ discourse; it was also a colonising one” (1996a: viii). To put this more stridently, the mythologising of history provides “a privileged shelter for the sovereignty of consciousness” (Foucault 1997: 12). The dismissal of Cook’s comparison between Britain and Australia can thus be understood as an historical erasure, a deletion that has augmented a particular view of Indigenous people’s pre-colonial social structures. Throughout the eight day encounter the local people resisted and attempted to avoid the landing party. On the eighth day they chose to boycott the area thus ending Cook’s hope of a noteworthy meeting (Nugent 2009).

Cook continued on his voyage of ‘discovery ‘sailing to an island seventeen kilometres off the tip of Cape York Peninsular in north Queensland. The traditional owners, the Gudang people and Kaurareg people, know the island as Bedanug. It was here that Cook felt certain no other European had previously landed. On Wednesday 22nd August 1770, Cook once more
planted the Union Jack and declared the whole of the east coast of Australia to be a British possession,

[Notwithstanding I had in the Name of His Majesty taken possession of several places upon this coast, I now once more hoisted English Coulers [sic] and in the Name of His Majesty King George the Third took possession of the whole Eastern Coast . . . by the name New South Wales, together with all the Bays, Harbours Rivers and Islands situate upon the said coast, after which we fired three Volleys of small Arms which were Answerd [sic] by the like number from the Ship (qtd. in State Library of New South Wales [NSW] 2018).

The hoisting of the British flag accompanied by the pomp and ceremony of a volley of firearms was indicative of the intentions of those whose force was yet to be realised. The practice of using a flag to take possession of land can be traced back several centuries. For example, during the Crusades flags were officially recognised as a way of transferring privilege or title to land. Throughout the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, as European colonists explored and seized lands in other parts of the world, the international legal principle of Discovery mandated that by planting their flag in the ground the ‘discovering’ European nation attained property rights and sovereign authority over the newly ‘discovered’ lands and peoples (Miller et al 2010).

Having planted the flag on Bedanug, Cook imposed a further linguistic declaration of British ownership and named the island “Possession Island”, a name it bears to this day. A white stone monument sits on the headland above the beach commemorating the place where Cook and the British flag claimed possession on behalf of King George III.

The ongoing failure to recognise Indigenous sovereignty in Australia can be traced back to 1768 when two directives contained in the Secret Instructions, which detailed the specifics of the voyage and were handed to Cook by the British Admiralty, were disregarded. First, if Cook ‘discovered’ land that was inhabited, he was instructed to make an alliance with the people and garner their consent before taking possession. Second, Cook was ordered to take possession of the land only if it was uninhabited:
[Y]ou are also with the Consent of the Natives to take Possession of Convenient Situations in the Country in the Name of the King of Great Britain: Or: if you find the Country uninhabited take Possession for his Majesty by setting up Proper Marks and Inscriptions, as first discoverers and possessors (Museum of Australian Democracy [MoAD] 2011a).

Cook knowingly instigated the illegal dispossession of Aboriginal land. Evidence supports the contention that he took matters into his own hands, “[A] man would not accomplish much in discovery who only stuck to orders” (Cook qtd. in Moorehead 1987: 62). Land ownership conferred exclusive rights for its use, administration, and future direction as part of the British Empire. Whoever lived on Crown land automatically became British citizens with rights and obligations under British law. However, for Indigenous people these rules and regulations were insurmountable. For example, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were not Christian they could not swear under oath, therefore any transgressions committed against them were legally inadmissible (Dingle 1988). Furthermore, as British citizens, Indigenous people could not wage war to defend their lands; if they killed or injured another British subject in protest of their dispossession, it was deemed a criminal offence. Tony Dingle asserts, “[T]he rules of war did not apply on the frontier but the criminal law did” (1988: 56). It was on the basis of the claims made during Cook’s voyage relating to “terra australis”8 and representations of “the aborigines” that “the British Government determined in 1785 that New Holland9 was a terra nullius, that is, no-man’s land” (Attwood 1996a: viii-ix).

Under British law, land that was not cultivated or seen to be inhabited with fixed abodes was deemed to be ‘empty land’ (Miller et al 2010). Terra nullius was the legal justification for the occupation of Australia. Cook’s refusal to abide by official dictates manifest in his actions

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8 Terra Australis Incognita, Latin for unknown southern land, was an imaginary continent which featured on European maps from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries.
9 Following the mid-16th century expeditions of the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman, the southern continent was referred to as New Holland.
and proclamations, the foundational basis upon which the colonial project came to rely. Rosemary Hunter asserts, “[T]he dispossession of the indigenous owners of this country was achieved by force but justified by Captain Cook’s law, which was a legal doctrine developed specifically by European jurists to facilitate colonialism” (1996: 6). As a result of Cook’s brief Australian voyage of ‘discovery’, a British penal colony was established. On 26 January 1788, eighteen years after Cook left Australian waters, the First Fleet, led by Captain Arthur Phillip, arrived at Kurnell. Unable to locate a suitable supply of fresh water, the fleet continued north and landed at Sydney Cove. There, the British flag was unfurled once more and guns again fired to announce the invasion. In 1938, the white nation celebrated 150 years of (dis)possession, and on 26 January a re-enactment of the landing and flag raising ceremony was staged.

10 John Kirwan (1934) claims that in 1828 Australia had a white population of 58,000. Some 40,000 lived in Sydney and its surrounds, the remaining 18,000 were in Tasmania. British authorities were uneasy, could “the two English-speaking isolated communities of New South Wales and Tasmania [constitute as] an effective occupation of a great island continent” (Kirwan 1934: 7-8). With this in mind, and underpinned by the known wealth of untapped agricultural and mineral resources, London sent official instructions to Sydney. On Christmas Day, 1826, a party of soldiers and convicts occupied King George’s Sound (Albany), in Western Australia and “the first official claim was made of British sovereignty all over Australia” (Kirwan 1934: 8-9).
In white Australia “Captain Cook” is renowned as something of a heroic figure. His name is taught to Australian children from an early age and popular culture is replete with the mythology of Cook’s ‘discovery’. There are, however, challenges to the official doctrine of Cook’s historical legacy. Maynard offers a distinctly oppositional view to that proffered in official narratives, likening Cook to a “time-travelling bogeyman” who, transcends time and space to wreak havoc across the continent upon the Aboriginal inhabitants over the course of the past 243 years. In this manifestation he represents white Australia in all its guises including invasion, occupation, dispossession and the conducting of a symphony of violence (2014a: 16).

Maynard draws attention to the way in which, for many Aboriginal people, “Captain Cook” is a metaphor, a euphemism for white Australia. Maynard notes that Cook has been embedded in Aboriginal narratives since first contact, and that the realities associated with his failure to
formally recognise that the Australian landscape was inhabited and sustained prior to his arrival are well understood. He argues that the perpetuation of Captain Cook narratives demonstrate the continuing persistence of Aboriginal worldviews. Hunter contends that Captain Cook narratives facilitate a way for Aboriginal people to assert truths which have been denied or obfuscated. She explores two Aboriginal truths: firstly, “Aboriginal Law is older, more venerable and generally superior to the immoral Captain Cook law relied on by the European invaders” and secondly, “the land belonged originally and still rightfully belongs to the Aborigines, and so its forcible acquisition by Europeans has no legitimacy” (Hunter 1996: 4). Hunter’s truths stand in sharp contrast to dominant settler-colonial narratives and make a significant contribution to an anti-colonial discourse that has, since invasion, challenged the ‘truths’ associated with official Cook narratives. As Nugent argues, “[T]his is no closed chapter of history. It is a past that is continually kept alive by constant talk about it” (2009:105).

Under the auspices of the Australian flag, which privileges the British flag, Captain Cook narratives and artistic responses continue to reflect the nature of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. They disclose the enduring violence of colonisation, its legacies of massacres, dispossession, enforced relocation, the removal of children and the ongoing litany of inequality that continues to affect many Aboriginal people. Nugent points out, “the name of Captain Cook became shorthand among Aboriginal people for ‘a large set of people, processes and regulations’ that had dispossessed them of their territory” (2009: 123). Many Aboriginal people distinguish between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ Captain Cooks, to the

11 Jason Wing recalls being taught in high school that James Cook discovered Australia, “[T]his colonial lie is further reinforced by a huge bronze sculpture in Hyde Park, Sydney, which is situated on a massacre site” (Wing 2017: 129). Wing’s reaction to this statue is one of physical repulsion and in response he produced a sculpture. 

12 Most recently a digital map which begins to document the scale of massacres has been developed by Professor Lyndall Ryan, “[T]he map shows massacres were widespread with intense periods of warfare, and often included soldiers and police” (Power 2017: 6). The massacres, Ryan states, “were conducted in secrecy and few perpetrators were brought to justice” (qtd. in Power 2017: 6)
extent that new Captain Cooks have become a euphemised reference point for colonial violence.

[When the old Captain Cook died, other people started thinking they could make Captain Cook another way. New people. Maybe all his sons. Too many Captain Cooks. They started shooting people then. New Captain Cook people... Those are the people that made war... They are the ones who have been stealing all the women and killing people. They have made war. Warmakers, those New Captain Cooks... And then they made a new thing called “welfare”. All the Captain Cook mob came and called themselves “welfare mob”... They wanted to take all of Australia... All the new people wanted anything they could get ... (Paddy Wainburranga qtd. in Mackinolty and Wainburranga, 1988: 359).

This way of seeing the ‘settlers’ and their descendants provides a counter discourse which calls into question the traditional colonial settler-histories of triumph and progress. By default, Captain Cook narratives comprise frames of reference that express the realities and tensions of ongoing power relationships inscribed by colonial rule.

In Australia colonial narratives continue to frame white understandings of history. For example, on 15 March 2013, then Federal Opposition Leader Tony Abbott made a pledge to become a Prime Minister for Aboriginal affairs, “[H]e said Australia could not feel ‘relaxed and comfortable’ unless Aboriginal people had comparable health, education and social opportunities to other Australians” (Keyzer and McGee 2014: 19). One year later Abbott addressed the Melbourne Institute and declared,

I guess our country owes its existence to a form of foreign investment by the British government in the then unsettled or, um, scarcely settled, Great South Land (qtd. in Koori Mail 16 July 2014: 4).

Former Member of Parliament, Nova Perris responded, “British settlement was not foreign investment. It was occupation” (qtd.in Koori Mail 16 July 2014: 4). National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples co-chair, Kirstie Parker said Abbott’s remarks “were wrong in fact, law, and history [and] clearly demonstrate how far some Australians have to go in
understanding this country’s true history” (qtd. in Koori Mail 16 July 2014: 4). Abbott’s comments are revealing, indicative of a “Captain Cook mindset”, which favours the terra nullius version of history. Statements such as this transmit a fundamental message of white superiority and are strategic to both the formation of knowledge and relations of power. Michel Foucault claims that “a statement is always an event that neither the language (langue) nor the meaning can quite exhaust” (1997: 28 emphasis in the original). Once uttered, the statement either enters the mind to linger, or materialises in print. A statement therefore exists with the capacity to be both repeated and reinvented and is inevitably linked with others which have gone before and are yet to follow.

The manipulation of Australian history has long suited the dominant interests, but not without a cost. Gerry Georgatos argues that when groups are unrepresented it causes a tension which

humiliates identity by making it a liability, cultural and historical and therefore we [minority groups] engage in what should be unnecessary, in the politics of identity, when equality should have brought us together in harmony (2013: 20).

While notions of “harmony” are somewhat ambiguous what Georgatos alludes to is the amount of ‘wasted’ energy which is expended by minority groups who daily battle for the basic human rights of justice and equality. For the wider population, the project of national “harmony” is something of a fantasy inspired by flag-waving and the commandeering of a swathe of national symbols. I suggest that it is the flag, and its attendant paraphernalia that work to inspire hegemonic ideals of harmony. The flag’s colonial insignia functions to reassure, to lay to rest anxieties. Under the banner of the national flag, the nation has the appearance of ‘unity’, however, without its visible comfort, the nation is forced to look inward at itself. It is the fear of this knowledge that drives the continual reinvigoration of national symbols without which non-Indigenous Australians would have to concede to the ongoing consequences of illegitimate
occupation. Ghassan Hage argues that fear is fundamental to Australia’s “colonial paranoia” which he states is, “a combination of the fragility of White European colonial identity in general and the Australian situation in particular” (2003: 49).

**Thesis Background: Flagging Inclusion**

Ben Wellings asserts the national flag is a metaphor of the nation and should “symbolize unity over division: whatever our political views, ethnicity, class, gender or regional location, the flag and nation are supposed to be above such potential sources of division” (2010: 15). As I seek to discover the Australian national flag’s ‘unifying’ capability through its dissemination, the representational force of the Union Jack holds particular interest. In 1770 Cook used the British flag to claim Australia as a possession for King George III. The British flag, the Union Jack, is the flag of my birthplace. It is the national symbol which socialised me as a child. Growing up in England, the Union Jack represented my national identity and symbolically connected me to the broader British population. I was socialised well.

When I migrated to Australia in 1984, I recall gleaning comfort from that little bit of ‘home’ which was sitting up there on the Australian flag – I felt included. Wellings echoes this sentiment commenting that his previous connection to the Union Jack meant settling in Australia was, “easier in a country where I only ever felt half-foreign” (2010: 22). My experience was similar. Somehow, the flag provided me with a sense of complacency and the promise of eventual assimilation into the cultural milieu. I wasn’t quite ‘outside’ or ‘inside’; I ‘sort of’ fitted in. I knew the language, and many of the social customs and despite a few cultural differences, the political, religious and legal landscape were similar, comprehensible, and not difficult as a migrant to navigate. Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues that British migrants “feel included in the nation because prepossession has been claimed on their behalf, hence their implicit understanding that the nation is a white possession” (2015: 29).

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13 See also Hage in Thornton (2017).
Furthermore she claims, British migrants’ amalgamation into “the narrative of Australian migration history works to separate them from the history of Indigenous dispossession” (2015: 28). Moreton-Robinson’s premise is compelling. On my arrival and for some time after, I viewed the Australian flag through a blinkered white migrant lens of privilege, and I did indeed feel somewhat ‘removed’ from the brutal realities of Australian history.

For many years it did not occur to me to question why the Union Jack featured on the Australian flag. Nor would I have considered what the flag might symbolise to Indigenous people. I did not wonder if it were acceptable, or indeed appropriate, that the Australian national flag had been colonised by the British flag just as the continent had been. When I returned to study and learned about the colonial history of Australia, I began to think about what the placement of the Union Jack might mean for those whose land and cultures had been colonised. These questions, accompanied by a need to know more, generated further questions. Eventually, I realised that a process of unlearning was taking place and that old and comfortable information was being replaced by less comfortable knowledge. Like most citizens of modern democracies, I had been institutionally socialised throughout my life into what Michael Billig refers to as “banal nationalism”, a term used to encompass “the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced” (2013: 6).

My interest in this thesis has thus been forged out of a combination of life experience and academic learning. It is an inquiry that has developed over time. In recent years I have reflected on the colonial symbolism of the national flag, its emblematic force, and its on-going effects. My discomfort with the flag’s colonial signification continues to challenge me and to impel my research. For many the flag is a symbolic endorsement of tradition, national values and a history encoded by a white, Christian ethos. Examples of this are located on the Australian National Flag Association’s (ANFA) homepage: “[I]t is our history book … you can’t change history” states Lindsay Fox, and Blainey asserts “[I]t is the flag of the people as
well as the nation” (qtd. in ANFA 2012a). The national flag as it stands today was not designed until 1901, and did not become the official national flag until Queen Elizabeth II gave her assent on 14 February 1954 (Kwan 2006). Prior to this, the national flag of Australia was the British Union Jack. And so, in reality the Australian national flag represents a selective and extremely small part of the continent’s history.

Carol Foley argues that the Union Jack, with its three Christian crosses is more than a mere colonial reminder of a past relationship with Britain. She states “[W]e are recognised throughout the world primarily as a Christian people, with Christian ethics and morals, and these ethics are interwoven into our social institutions” (1996a: 93). The Union Jack, she claims, stands in testimony to “our” British origins: of governance, language, education, democracy, religious and spiritual inheritance. Conversely, for Indigenous people, what does the Union Jack stand in testimony to? Noel Pearson identifies the need for inclusion and argues that, “Australia’s Indigenous heritage should rightly sit alongside these fundamental British traditions and institutions” (2013: 23).

Since invasion, Indigenous people in Australia have experienced systemic and ongoing hardship. Paternalistic policies and practices were designed to foster deprivation and exclusion and resulted in generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being denied access to their land, kinship networks, cultural practices, languages, wages, and health services. Indigenous people were educated according to colonial mandates. In some areas it was obligatory and in other areas, forbidden. Until the mid-twentieth century Indigenous people were excluded from participating in political, social and legal systems. The systematic application of exclusion is enshrined constitutionally: of the 128 sections of the Australian Constitution there is no recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. George

14 The Australian Constitution (Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1900) is Australia’s founding document. It took over a decade to develop and was drafted without Aboriginal input or consultation. The
Williams notes, “Australia is the last democracy with a constitution permitting laws that discriminate on the basis of race” (2012: 10). Section 25 of the constitution allows the states to disallow entire races of people from voting. The ‘races power’ in section 51(xxvi) allows the Federal Parliament to initiate laws that discriminate for or against people based upon their race.

Pearson argues that the Australian Constitution is a racist document and that the “allowance and promotion of racial discrimination is at odds with fundamental tenets of democracy” (2013: 23). Former Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, acknowledges that prior to Federation 1901, there was a decade of planning in which the colonies debated how the Constitution was to be crafted,

[B]ut there is no record of any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person taking part. Indigenous people did not ordain our Constitution nor contribute to its drafting. They had no opportunity to vote for it, and yet all were affected by what it said and what it failed to say. They were affected by provisions that even by the standards of the time seem questionable and strike us now as harsh and inhumane. But they were also affected by the “great Australian silence” which fell upon our founding document. Because among the 128 sections of the Constitution, there is no acknowledgement of Australia’s First Peoples (qtd. in National Indigenous Times 20 February 2013: 19).

To include Indigenous people in the Australian Constitution or change its discriminatory bias requires a referendum, as Gillard explains,

...recognition [of Indigenous people] is not a matter for politicians or experts. Instead, the Constitution belongs to the people. It was created by them. It serves them. And it is amendable by them alone (qtd. in National Indigenous Times 20 February 2013: 19).

constitution came into force on 1 January, 1901. As the modern Australian nation was born it was specific in its exclusion of Aboriginal people. Section 127 stated, “[I]n reckoning the number of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted” (Sanders 2005: 220). Section 51 (xxvi) authorised the Commonwealth to make laws with respect to, “[T]he people of any race, other than the aboriginal race in any state, for who it is deemed necessary to make special laws” (Sanders 2005: 220). It was not until the 1967 Referendum that these exclusionary clauses were removed: section 127 was deleted and section 51 (xxvi) was revised and the middle phrase deleted.

15 In his delivery of the 1968 ABC Boyer Lectures, William Stanner coined the term “The Great Australian Silence”. This phrase describes what Stanner argues is the historic and deliberate neglect of Indigenous people in all facets of Australian life (see Chapter Two).
The fundamental principle of inclusion thus rests with the wider population and in the twenty-first century the reasoning for this is extraordinary. Australia’s founding document “belongs” to the people who created it. This document was “created” by white society, it “serves” white society and as it stands today, it “belongs” to white society. This is the discourse of white prerogative. Such leverage satiates the dominant mindset with inherently false notions of power and legitimacy as it relegates Indigenous people once more to the behest of the white majority. Crucially, Pearson states it is “not for mainstream Australia to confer recognition upon Indigenous people, but for Indigenous people to decide whether that type of recognition was something they wanted” (qtd. in Maxwell 2015: 5). Narrungga Elder, Tauto Sansbury argues “[T]hey could have put something in the Constitution from day one but they didn’t” (qtd. in Koori Mail 23 September 2015: 3). Since invasion, the political and social climate has excluded Indigenous people, and this has had significant impacts on health and wellbeing outcomes.

The 2014 Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) ‘Poverty in Australia Report’ finds that the determinants of disadvantage can interrelate and perpetuate social exclusion. The multi-dimensional nature of disadvantage, such as material inequality, political and social exclusion, means that for many Indigenous people, poverty and adversity are intergenerational and according to Daphne Habibis & Maggie Walter are “directly related to the history of black-white relations in Australia” (2010: 75). While the detrimental effects of both structural and social racism are well documented, it is only in more recent years that research has found that the experiences of racism negatively impact physical and mental health and wellbeing. In July 2013, the Federal Government launched its new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan. Pat Anderson, chairwoman of the Lowitja Institute, Australia’s National Institute for

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16 The seven social exclusion indicators identified are: health, education, employment, material resources, social connection, community and personal safety (ACOSS 2014).
17 Pat Anderson received the 2016 Human Rights Medal for her significant contribution and lifetime commitment to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Koori Mail 11 January 2017: 9).
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research, considers it ground-breaking because for the first time racism is identified as a key driver of ill-health. Anderson calls for social and political change through education and debate and for all Australians to understand that racism in all its forms has health implications for Indigenous people. Anderson’s dialogue concerning “connection” is significant. Not only must Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be able to connect with their families, communities and cultures, “[W]e must also feel connected to the rest of society. Racism cuts that connection” (Anderson 2014: 20).

How do these findings which clearly identify the health implications of racism, however “casual”, and the importance of social connection, intersect with the national flag? Does the Australian national flag have the capacity to provoke feelings of disconnection or exclusion for Indigenous people? In relation to this and the fundamental importance of both inclusion and connection Lowitja O’Donoghue’s view of the flag is worth citing in detail,

[O]ur national flag should be a symbol of our national ideals and of the people we want to be. We regard ourselves as independent, individual and inclusive – but our existing flag, our national symbol says none of this...

We are a country that prides itself on diversity and tolerance, yet some of us cling to a flag that represents a monoculture and intolerance. We are a country that has debated important national issues such as justice, rights and identity, yet the current flag symbolises quite the opposite – complacency, dependency and subordination (qtd. in Ausflag 2013)

O’Donoghue raises important questions about the flag’s (in)capacity to both truthfully represent the nation’s history and also, its ability to symbolically project the nation’s current and future aspirations. In marking “complacency, dependency and subordination” as notable facets of the flag’s representational force, O’Donoghue brings to the fore the fracture between symbol and reality, between the national flag as a material object and its symbolic power to represent the nation. She pinpoints the racial hierarchy upon which the nation is built, and
draws attention to the exclusion that is clearly made visible through the iconography of the national flag.

**Conclusion**

This inquiry is both an analysis and a cultural history of the Australian national flag. The thesis is also an exploration into Australian national identity that encompasses some of the questions that demand my attention. As a research project, this work seeks to disclose the ‘what’, ‘why’, and ‘how’ of the Australian national flag through an examination of its history, its uses and applications in the public domain, and its political force as a socio-cultural regulator of this nation state. I question what it might mean for Indigenous people to come into daily contact with this prominent symbol. Furthermore, I ask how the force of the flag is maintained: what sustains it? What gives it life in the national imagination?

This investigation will throughout be attentive to the manifold ways in which whiteness and nation interpellate through national symbols which forge identity, power and knowledge. This methodology will be discussed in Chapter Two. An exploration into how and why the modern nation was created will be discussed in Chapter Three. Following this, in Chapter Four I will examine how the modern Australian nation has been maintained. Chapter Five will provide information relating to the history of flags, the construction of both the Union Jack and Australian flag, and will consider various applications of the flag. Chapter Six will investigate the longstanding resistance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to colonial rule as a prelude to Chapter Seven which will look specifically at Indigenous responses and reactions to the Australian national flag. At this introductory point, I draw from the metaphorical “between the flags” of the Australian beach where the nation is instructed to swim in order to maintain ‘safety’ and ‘cohesion’. Through the study of vexillology I aim to provide another way of understanding Australian society. Who is included and who is not? By exploring the
binary of this question, I hypothesise that *somewhere between the flags* lies a national identity that can be re-imagined through a symbol which includes all of its citizens.
CHAPTER TWO: Methodology

The scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects.

(Bhabha 1994: 209).

Introduction

Repeated exposure to national signs, when combined with a nationalist discourse, constitutes, as Homi Bhabha notes, the signs of a “coherent national culture”. The recurring utility of the national flag across all institutional sites makes a significant contribution to the illusion of coherence. In this chapter I outline the theoretical framework which will underscore my analysis of the Australian national flag. I begin with a review of the literature. For several decades, the literature available has identified that the ‘functions’ of national flags have been under-researched. From my research, it is also evident that there is a noticeable absence of Indigenous viewpoints in the literature which relate to the Australian national flag. An examination of how whiteness functions will help to reveal its relationship with the formation and maintenance of Australian national identity. The union of flag and nation is a site of conflicting opinions that constitutes tension for many people. I draw from the work of Martin Nakata to explore the parameters and opportunities which exist at what Nakata calls the “cultural interface”. I also examine Michael Billig’s theory of “banal nationalism” to ascertain the effectiveness of the flag as a seemingly neutral and unremarkable symbol of day to day life. In order to facilitate a way to understand how the Australian flag intersects and influences the socio-political landscape, this methodology is informed by work in the field of vexillology.

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18 Disciplining the Savages: Savaging the Disciplines (Nakata 2008a).
19 Banal Nationalism (Billig 2013).
Scot Guenter argues that the focused study of flags, vexillology, can facilitate “deeper understandings of the complex processes of social behavior and cultural systems” (2010: 1). In the Australian context, analysis of the national flag’s uses and applications, and an exploration into its relationship with nation building, discloses much about Australian society, both past and present. Australian national identity is underscored by the illegitimate nature of British settlement, the ongoing repercussions of which are compounded by a systemic failure to recognise Indigenous sovereignty. Patrick Sullivan claims “Australian national identity will remain hollow at the core until we develop a sense of belonging together” (2011: 122). Sullivan stresses the importance of including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at all levels of the nation, as does the Assembly of First Nations (AFN). The introduction of the AFN draft interim charter promotes and advocates for an ongoing dialogue and engagement, “between the First Nations and all levels of the Australian government and industry” (Koori Mail 16 December 2015: 30). Patrick Dodson calls for national political leadership to “forge new systems of governance that include Indigenous people as honoured partners in Australian nation building” (2007: 28). Most recently the Referendum Council recommends, “a referendum be held to provide in the Australian Constitution for a representative body that gives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Nations a Voice to the Commonwealth Parliament” (Referendum Council 2017a). The inclusion of an Indigenous advisory body into the Australian Parliament would, for the first time, provide Indigenous people the opportunity to discuss the laws and policies that concern them.21

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20 The Referendum Council was established in December 2015 to advise the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader on Constitutional recognition. Widespread consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from across the nation culminated with a convention at Uluru in the Northern Territory. Supported by the majority of delegates the ‘Uluru Statement from the Heart’ was drawn up (See Appendix A) and on 30 June 2017 the Referendum Council issued its recommendation for constitutional change.

21 On 26 October 2017 information was leaked to the media that revealed the recommendation for a “Voice to Parliament” had been rejected by the Turnbull government. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion and Attorney-General George Brandis released a joint statement in which they argue, “the idea of a representative assembly for Indigenous Australia – in addition to the House of Representatives and Senate – would be inconsistent with the fundamental democratic principle of all citizens having equal civic rights”
Sullivan (2011) also claims that through language, practice and values non-Indigenous people must recognise and acknowledge their implication in the lives of Indigenous people. The following statement identifies the core values of the Australian National Flag Association,

[I]t is vitally important, in this time of rapid change, that our National Flag with the history, heritage and traditions that it represents be NOT destroyed by unrepresentative and divisive lobby groups pushing radical political views.

Welcome to ANFA a patriotic and voluntary organisation dedicated to promoting pride, respect and understanding in the Australian way of life by acknowledgment of the principles for which our Flag of “Stars and Crosses” proudly represents to our generations and those coming.22

From this it is evident that the ANFA is strident in protecting what it deems to be the symbol of “the Australian way of life”, which is replete with British “history, heritage and traditions”. In this endorsement of the national flag, any recognition of Indigenous people is absent. The words used by the ANFA are not new; they have been part of Australian national discourse for over a century. In 1914, the Sydney Daily Telegraph explored reactions to the Union Jack from around the British Empire and branded any denouncer of the flag as an “infuriated extremist” (qtd. in Crowley 1973: 206). A range of responses included, a “wild Irishman” who described the flag as “dirty” and a “strike-leader in South Africa” who consigned the flag to “hell”, while in India “once more” the flag “was held up to hatred as the symbol of oppression by the orators of unrest” (qtd. in Crowley 1973: 206). From these examples it becomes apparent that for over one hundred years the British Union Jack has been a symbol of division.23

(Hunter 2017: 6). The date has a significant resonance. On 26 October 1985, Uluru, formerly known as “Ayers Rock” was ‘handed back’ by the Australian Government to its traditional owners. For cultural reasons, the Anangu traditional owners have decided to ban people from climbing Uluru. The last climbing day will be on 26 October 2019 (Koori Mail 15 November 2017:1).

22 This extract is taken from the ANFA membership form, made available at the National Flag Day Ceremony in Martin Place, Sydney, 3 September 2015. The membership form includes the following pledge: “I promise allegiance to Australia and our National Flag of “Stars and Crosses.” To serve my country and all its people faithfully and to uphold Australia’s laws, customs, values and traditions to the best of my ability”.

23 Throughout the world the Union Jack continues to leave its mark. It is a living symbol, as the flags of New Zealand, Fiji, Tuluva and Australia testify. In order to give the flag a more contemporary relevance there have
The *Daily Telegraph* pays tribute to the Union Jack stating it holds “so many millions of mankind in affection or respect or fear” (qtd. in Crowley 1973: 206). The notion that for some this flag is a symbol of “fear” is dispelled by the newspaper through rhetoric which defers to Britain’s strength, arguing that the flag offers protection and achievement, and is “vitally related to justice and civilisation, and to all else that makes for the happiness and betterment of mankind” (qtd. in Crowley 1973: 206). The virtues of the British Empire are extolled and Australians are duly instructed on how to attach themselves to both flag and Empire,

[T]he way to get a healthy and inspiring pride in our Empire-citizenship and in the flag as the Empire’s symbol is to get the Empire idea into our minds and to cultivate it (qtd. in Crowley 1973: 207).

The development of nationalism is thus fostered through a set of discursive practices that come into being as the material artefacts of nation. These include an array of symbols, artworks, literary works, film, television programmes and so on that constitute national culture in its many and various formations. Nationalism is widely disseminated and so it enters the psyche of the body politic as a creed that is shared among the citizenry. Nationalism depends upon a tangible sign for its efficacy so the importance of a nation’s flag cannot be overstated. Set a century apart, the above-mentioned examples from the ANFA and *Daily Telegraph* propel a discourse, a set of statements and practices, which seeks to uphold and embellish the virtues of British heritage. Discourses carry with them the ability to be reinvented and rejuvenated, thus the transmission of past assumptions and values are never entirely extinguished; they lie in readiness, patiently waiting to (re)present themselves.

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been calls to include a fourth cross. A cross of thin black stripes, “to remind the citizens of the living legacy of colonialism” (Eriksen 2007: 6).

24 This was the era of Australian nation creation. On 12 March 1913 the foundation stone of the nation’s capital was laid. The Attorney-General stated that “Canberra was the visible sign” of the nation and argued, “[T]he people are incapable of nourishing abstract ideals. They must have a symbol” (qtd. in Crowley 1973: 194).
Theoretical Background

What the Literature Revealed

There is a dearth of literature on Indigenous views of the Australian national flag. It could be argued that this missing dialogue, unmasking Indigenous peoples’ views about the “scraps” of material which create the Australian flag, and its symbolism, are excluded from public discourse precisely because they challenge the legitimacy of the colonising culture. Through this silencing white privilege remains secure and race inequality is kept in place. In her critique of the Australian national flag, Foley conducted a survey in 1994. The focus of her research was to explore Aboriginal responses to the possible merger of the Aboriginal and Australian national flags. Foley wrote to between sixty and seventy different Aboriginal groups and received answers from approximately 40 per cent. Overall, the responses called for the removal of the Union Jack, and for the Aboriginal flag to remain an exclusive symbol of Aboriginal identity. As outlined by Foley reactions to the survey included the following:

- “Have something that symbolizes the whole Australia, not something that separates our two cultures”.
- “Anything is better than the Union Jack”.
- “I believe in no uncertain terms that the Union Jack must go … the large star representing the states, again as a symbol of colonisation, should go” (1996a: 180).

Of the mooted cultural exchange of the Union Jack with the Aboriginal flag, Foley writes,

[A] few people noted that to replace the Union Jack with the Aboriginal flag was merely to exchange the flag of one cultural group for another, which would be equally divisive in a flag that should be representative of us all and not single out any one cultural group for special treatment (1996a: 181).

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25 The proposal being to replace the Union Jack in the upper left corner with the Aboriginal flag.
Foley’s use of the term “special treatment” as something to be avoided in a flag warrants comment given the “special treatment” favouring white Australia that is encoded in the current national flag. Foley argues that her sample is, “of course, far too small to generate any findings that can be extrapolated to the broader Aboriginal community” (1996a: 180). What can be “extrapolated”, however, is that since at least 1994 there has been a specific call by Aboriginal people for the Union Jack to be removed from the Australian national flag, and that this request has not received considered attention.

The literature reveals that there is a gap in the research relating to the relationship between flags and national identity. Whitney Smith (1975) contends that the origins, forms, functions and messages of flags are little understood. William Crampton argues that writers have neglected “the important role of non-verbal, non-abstract, symbols, [and] the idea that these can be consciously and deliberately employed in a coherent programme for the establishment of a national identity” (1994: 6). Karen Cerulo (1993) points out that research into symbols is in its infancy and that reactions to national symbols have been under-researched. In order to recognise the power that symbols exert over the national audience Cerulo states that a thorough social and symbolic investigation is required. Once the representational force of national symbols is better understood, questions pertaining to power and national identity can be further investigated. Catherine Palmer (1998) claims theoretical debates about the social processes which have constructed national identity are limited, as key theorists have failed to address the ways in which the nation is daily maintained.

More recently, Thomas Eriksen and Richard Jenkins assert that “national differences in the meaning, political significance and uses of flags are rarely studied at all” (2007: xiii). They acknowledge that while the political and symbolic importance of flags has been recognised by scholars of nationalism, there has been a lack of in-depth studies relating to the influence of flags on national identities. They argue that flags have been poorly theorised and are “only
mentioned in passing in most social science studies of nationalism” (Eriksen and Jenkins 2007: xiii). Edwin Crump (2012) states also that flags as symbolic devices are under-researched. Social psychologist David Butz (2009) concurs, noting that little research has been conducted to garner the implications of flag exposure. Butz stresses the particular need for field research “to examine the function and implications of national symbols in areas where differing group identities are strong, as such investigations may reveal their truly divisive nature” (2009: 799). The importance of having a deeper understanding of the responses elicited by national symbols has significant consequences. In fact Butz asserts that there are “real-world” implications associated with investigating national symbols for both the public policy and social inclusion arenas which, “will be useful for future legislative decisions and efforts to create identity-inclusive national symbols” (2009: 800). The critical application of vexillology deepens our understandings about the power exerted by flags, “in creating and changing individual and group identities, in maintaining or challenging the power structure in any given society” (Guenter 2001: 205). Elizabeth Kwan (1994a) claims that while the Australian flag has been mentioned by Australian historians of nationalism, its role has not been explored, an argument she has reiterated in recent times, “Australian flags’ symbolism and the perceptions of those flags are both areas needing research and analysis” (2015 pers. comm., 5 Oct).

In Australia, the national flag has been employed as an unambiguous signifier that heralds hegemonic understandings of national identity as it simultaneously connects the nation to Britain, as both the “mother land” and the colonising force. From the outset, Australian national identity was and remains to some extent, implicated by British nationalism. As Richard White has argued, “Australia has long supported a whole industry of image-makers to tell us what we are” (1981: viii). Notions of national identity, White claims, need to be explored in order to ascertain, “what their function is, whose creation they are, and whose interests they serve” (viii). White puts forward a number of arguments in which national identity, as a
phenomenon of the modern western nation, has been created and is manipulated by those in power. Ideals of national identity, according to White, have been created through relationships of reciprocity and validation between those who have historically defined Australian identity – the intelligentsia (writers, journalists, artists and academics) and the economic power-brokers. National identity therefore serves a social function and it is in the dominant interests to control it.

In 1968, eminent Australian anthropologist, William Stanner delivered the Boyer Lectures in which he examined the status of Aboriginal people and their relationship with the wider white population. In recent decades Stanner’s lectures have come to occupy a central place in academic discourse and debates regarding race relations in Australia. His term “cult of forgetfulness” is renowned and has without doubt had a significant impact on revisionist histories. Stanner identified both the structural inequality within Australian society and the amnesia that accompanies it,

[I]t is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale (1974: 24-25).

Michael Billig perceives “forgetfulness” as a deliberate omission underscored by ideological intent and he argues that social scientists have knowingly overlooked how the nation is reproduced,

… the sociological forgetting is not fortuitous; nor is it to be blamed on the absent-mindedness of particular scholars. Instead, it fits an ideological pattern in which ‘our’ nationalism (that of established nations …) is forgotten: it ceases to appear as nationalism, disappearing into the ‘natural’ environment of ‘societies’ (2013: 38).

Billig examines how the dominant values of nation are perpetuated on a daily basis and the ease with which society becomes indoctrinated. He seeks to unravel the concept of nation
which exists, he contends, in the collective thought process of nationalist rhetoric and practice. To draw attention to this is a challenge, for apart from the days of overt, staged nationalism, and times of crises, nationalism is so laboriously repeated and so deeply embedded within the day to day cultural landscape that it’s rarely given a second thought.

**Under the Blanket of Whiteness**

Moreton-Robinson claims that in Australia “[W]hiteness is both the measure and marker of normality ... In its corporeal form, whiteness is a signifier of many things – including nationhood” (2008a: 66-67). The Australian national flag is the primary symbol of nationhood and is thus the most significant form of white Australian cultural capital: a material device the national flag is recognisable, portable, inexpensive, accessible, and can be found in all manner of places. An examination of the flag therefore demands an investigation into how whiteness operates both at a material and philosophical level in the day-to-day socio-cultural milieu. George Yancy comments that “undoing whiteness is inextricably linked to undoing those structural power relationships that continue to privilege whites” (2008: 242). Richard Dyer states that, “[T]he point of looking at whiteness is to dislodge it from its centrality and authority, not to reinstate it” (2003: 305). In this work whiteness is understood as an invisible set of practices that endows inherent and routinely unacknowledged privileges upon its recipients.

Moreton-Robinson sees whiteness as a condition that operates discursively to reproduce itself: “whiteness”, she argues, “is constitutive of the epistemology of the West; it is an invisible regime of power that secures hegemony through discourse and has material effects in everyday life” (2011a: 75). As a normative set of practices whiteness routinely goes unchallenged by those who benefit from it, because, as Marcia Langton asserts “white Australians do not see themselves as having a ‘race’” (1999: 35). Therefore to be “involved in the process of racialising whiteness” (Moreton-Robinson 1999: 29), is not only a commitment to combatting
racism (McKay 1999), but it also enables a critical understanding of whiteness as a form of agency which is manufactured to maintain the hierarchy of racial privilege.

In her influential work, *Whiteness as Property*, Cheryl Harris (1993) explores how whiteness became a valuable form of property through the oppression of Indigenous people and the appropriation of their lands. She argues also that whiteness has been ‘created’ through practices based on racial exclusion and subjugation. Whiteness is omniscient, structural and pervasive, forged from the appropriation of Indigenous lands. Harris asserts,

[W]hiteness has functioned as self-identity in the domain of the intrinsic, personal, and psychological; as reputation in the interstices between internal and external identity; and, as property in the extrinsic, public, and legal realms. According whiteness actual legal status, converted an aspect of identity into an external object of property, moving whiteness from privileged identity to a vested interest (1993: 1725).

Harris draws attention to the legal structures which legitimate and protect the inherited expectations of whiteness. She states that whiteness as property, “is a ghost that has haunted the political and legal domains in which claims for justice have been inadequately addressed for far too long” (1993: 1791). Harris understands whiteness as an insidious force, both tangible and intangible, a condition that permeates the nation based on the principle of ownership through racialised notions of privilege. In relation to the construction of national identity, Harris argues that whiteness is a central feature.

In Australia, the centrality of whiteness in the construction of nation has been sanctioned by the law. Since first contact, laws have been set in place and enacted to enhance, protect and serve the vested interests of white authority. From Cook’s foundational act of theft and the construct of *terra nullius*, to the White Australia Policy, Australia was conceived and legally ratified for “the white man”, as evidenced by the *Bulletin* magazine. With the

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26 The *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* is commonly referred to as the White Australia Policy. From 1901-1973 the White Australia Policy sanctioned a white Australian nation.
emergence of the new Australian nation in 1901 the *Bulletin* (published for over one hundred years), set about constructing corresponding understandings of national identity, “Australia is our country … It represents, in a sense, the last chance of the white race … there is no other place on earth where a new and purely white community can be reared …” (the *Bulletin* 1906 qtd. in Crowley 1973: 96). In order to establish and secure this racialised order throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, racially discriminatory domestic policies of ‘Protection’ and ‘Assimilation’ were employed to constrict and control all facets of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In the twenty first century, white policies of repression have continued, sanctioned by both sides of politics.

For example the Liberals, under the leadership of John Howard, led the Northern Territory Intervention 27 a policy that continues, albeit under a different name of ‘Stronger Futures’ endorsed by both Labor leaders, Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard. Policy continues to dictate issues of ‘race’ in the Australian nation and as such, renders it a modern day anomaly. New Zealand, Canada and the United States, like Australia, are considered ‘settler’ colonial states, however Australia stands apart as it has no treaty with Indigenous people. Fiona Nicoll explains that “the racialised trope of perspective pushes Indigenous sovereignty claims towards the pole of ‘subjectivity’ while granting the everyday imposition of white sovereignty an aura of ‘objective authority’” (2011: 20). Ongoing practices and policies of whiteness ensure that Indigenous sovereignty remains circumscribed. This is a systemic failure. As Yancy notes,

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27 The *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007* was passed 18 August 2007. It was a reaction to the *Little Children are Sacred* report which identified a wide range of criminal and predatory abuse against children. All the claims were “fused together to create the impression of a storm of paedophilia” (Rundle 2007: 43). The responsible Minister, Mal Brough admitted he did not read the Act of 500 pages before it was passed, and incredibly the word ‘children’ does not appear. The magnitude of the measures enforced were drastic. Among other things the Racial Discrimination Act was suspended, income protection introduced, and the Community Development Employment Scheme was abandoned. Aboriginal lands were seized for up to five years, the use of alcohol and pornography was restricted (80% of homeland areas were already voluntarily alcohol free and there was no evidence of serious pornography use). The Howard Government did not consult with Aboriginal people or child protection experts, instead it sent the army into the Northern Territory to deal with the ‘National Emergency’ (Concerned Australians 2010). Ten years on and the intervention has been assessed as a $587 million failure which achieved nothing, “locals still faced low employment, substandard education and inadequate food, housing and health facilities” (*Koori Mail* 31 May 2017: 13).
“whiteness continues to be a living, breathing historical construction, a social ontological performance that has profound, pervasive, and systemic oppressive consequences for nonwhite people” (2004: 14).

Dyer states, “[A]s long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm” (1997: 1). Whiteness is a ubiquitous force that interrelates with sets of social and institutionalised practices and so has the capability to unify diasporic sections of the population. Dyer claims that whiteness “as a coalition” is more effective than class in “uniting people across national cultural differences” (1997:19). In this “coalition” of cultural amalgamation race is seemingly absent. White people are multifariously stereotyped in terms of reference according to: nation, class, sexuality, ability and gender. “Whiteness” Dyer argues “generally colonizes the stereotypical definition of all social categories other than those of race” (2003: 307). Yancy contends that all whites, even the most poor who share similar class and economic struggles to those of blacks, are better placed in society, “to be a poor white does not mean that one inhabits a space of ‘post-whiteness’” (2004: 7). Furthermore, “[U]nder the system of white hegemony, poor whites also manage to reap aesthetic and psychological rewards as a result of possessing the valued property of whiteness” (Yancy 2004: 8). These insights provide the space to further understand the modus operandi of whiteness and to disrupt that which is routinely accepted. Or to put this more eloquently,

[W]e must question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognized from the outset; we must oust those forms and obscure forces by which we usually link the discourse of one man with that of another; they must be driven out from the darkness in which they reign (Foucault 1997: 22).

Larissa Behrendt argues “[I]t is only when we understand how the ideologies of colonialism have permeated today’s institutions that we can begin to break the grip of the
historical legacy” (2003: 8). Behrendt also claims that “seemingly neutral institutions are actually charged with colonial ideologies, legacies and a psychological terra nullius that cause disparate outcomes” (2003: 21). Behrendt highlights how apparently innocuous products of nation are in fact “charged” with racism. As the most prominent signifier of nation, nationalism and national identity, the national flag occupies a very specific place in the repository of everyday symbols. The flag’s ubiquity ensures that it is ‘flagged’ permanently across the nation, in every town and city, in every institutional site, at all manner of celebrations and events, a potent reminder, emblematic of ‘who we are’, and equally, who ‘we’ are not: a symbol of both racial superiority and racial subjugation.

Yancy asserts that “[T]he social ontology of whiteness is a species of racism” (2004: 14). In marking whiteness as a species, Yancy brings it to ‘life’ and thus whiteness is imbued with a corporeality that refutes notions of it as casual, passive or inert. Conceived of as a living entity, whiteness embodies agency; thus, it has the capacity to flourish, or to die. Yancy states that white people routinely evade “discussing their own social, political, economic, and cultural investments in whiteness” (2004: 4). Yancy argues here that habitual avoidance is an activity that the “species” of whiteness must perform in order to perpetuate white privilege; in other words, without the activity that ensures the survival of the species, whiteness could disappear. Therefore, as he further argues, “whiteness will never be innocent” (2004: 6). Whiteness must always and necessarily be activated by avoidance – and by a range of oppressive practices that ensure its supremacy. Yancy states that whiteness “systematically excludes, derails, polices, segregates, and murders” (2008: 238). Colonial systems of governance are grounded in widespread oppression. Ruth Frankenberg asserts an investigation into colonial history identifies how and why, race, culture, and nation slide so smoothly one into another in the present, providing alibis for each other in contemporary social, cultural, and political discourses about race, nation, identity, ownership, and belonging (1997: 9).
An analysis of Australia’s political, economic and social history demonstrates that the construction of whiteness and nation are tightly connected. The modern Australian nation, forged from the matrix of white patriarchal sovereignty and nationalism is thus conceived “as norm, as transparency, as national/natural state of being” (Frankenberg 1997: 16). Louise Chiodo notes, “[T]o be white in Australia is to occupy a position of structural advantage and perceived race neutrality that often remains unmarked and unnamed” (2015: 43). Chiodo highlights the lack of Indigenous presence in the planning of urban, institutional and civic spaces, arguing that these spaces are a “significant form of cultural capital … [which] reflect and reaffirm ideas about whiteness, Australian-ness and possession” (2015: 43). The nation’s flag, which adorns many of these sites of cultural capital provides a powerful visual augmentation of white sovereignty.

Moreton-Robinson notes that while whiteness has been theorised as various forms of power, rarely “are the theoretical focuses drawn to the social constructions of white identity” (2015: xviii). An examination of these forces, she argues, will enable whiteness to be analysed in ways other than from the perspective of cultural difference. In addition, if theorising incorporates Indigenous sovereignty and a colonial nation-state then, “a different picture of analysis emerges. The existence of white supremacy as hegemony, ideology, epistemology, and ontology requires the possession of Indigenous lands as its proprietary anchor” (Moreton-Robinson 2015: xix). White patriarchal sovereignty is understood as a regime of power that has its origins in the illegal possession of Aboriginal land. White Australians therefore “receive unearned social benefits as the inheritors of a racially based system of wealth and privilege … built upon the European invasion of Indigenous lands” (McKay 1999:4). Moreton-Robinson asserts that the modern Australian nation and its identity were constructed through the disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty, thus “[R]ace indelibly marks the politics of possessive
investments in patriarchal white sovereignty, which are often invisible and unnamed in everyday discourse and academic analyses” (2007: 101).

Moreton-Robinson claims that “[P]atriarchal whiteness operates possessively as a raced and gendered epistemological a priori within knowledge production as universals, dominant norms, values and beliefs” (2011b: 414). In Australia the stalwart institutions of the nation remain firmly in the grip of a white patriarchal social order. Andrew Bragg, member of the Australian Republican Movement, draws attention to Australia’s top 200 companies of which only 5 per cent of the CEOs are women. Furthermore, he notes the reluctance to endorse women in leadership roles is matched by a reticence to engage with an Australian republic. Despite the fact that “business gets symbolism” he claims, “there are virtually no public utterances from business leaders on the dated symbols of a foreign hereditary head of state, knights and dames or the Union Jack” (2016:14). As Bragg points out, relationships of power are intricate. This example demonstrates how Australian patriarchal institutions are affiliated with the British monarchy and its symbols which raises the supposition that the symbols of British authority continue to reinforce the power and legitimacy of Australian powerbrokers.

As an unnamed inherited phenomenon, whiteness extends a sense of normalcy, and so for many white people whiteness deflects criticism. What results from this is a ‘whiteness asrightness’ ideology which sets in motion a general acceptance of white ways and ‘things’ – celebratory days and symbols, for example. Any perceived threats to the status quo are met with resistance. Whites “will defend its values and place negative sanctions upon Indigenous people who contradict or expose the hypocrisy of white values in practice” (Moreton-Robinson 1999: 33). Former Federal Liberal MP Dennis Jensen publicly criticised programs designed to improve outcomes for Indigenous people which led to the following exchange on Twitter,

“Hell, how long ago was colonialism? Get over it … every country in the world has been successfully invaded in the past!”
@TheKooriWoman responded: “Do I snap my fingers and forget 213 years of oppression Mr Jensen? Which has created effects that are still being played out.”

Dr Jensen responded: “It is time to unify Australia, not divide based on a victim mentality. What do you do when knocked down, just blame … So you have personally lived 213 years? Work out ways to maximise your own life experiences, you can’t for deceased ancestors” (qtd. in Harrison: 2013: 5).

These comments by a serving Federal parliamentarian exemplify how whiteness provides a “culturally-constructed centrality” from which a white person, “evaluates and judges” (Yancy 2004: 9). Jensen uses a common colonial strategy: he dismisses the ongoing effects of invasion while simultaneously laying the blame for disadvantage with Aboriginal people. While relationships of power between white Australia and Indigenous people have altered over the course of colonial history, whiteness has effectively kept, and continues to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the periphery of nation-building and decision-making.

Since first contact Indigenous people have studied white people. Moreton-Robinson claims that whiteness is “ever present in the psyche of Indigenous people, but not because of its absence” (1999: 35). Where white citizens fail to see their whiteness, Indigenous people are acutely aware,

[W]e are positioned as not being entitled to an equal share in the resources of Australian society as our interests are not included within the sphere of the interests of the nation. Indigenous people know that white culture does not respect, value or view as legitimate and valid our knowledges and rights on our own terms (Moreton-Robinson 1999: 35).

The habitual neglect of the white citizenry to disseminate whiteness not only reinforces white privilege but it also affords little space for scrutiny. Nicoll (2011) argues that very few white people have an embodied ontological awareness of being in Indigenous sovereignty; rather, they form an opinion which refuses to engage with Indigenous discourses and thus they assume

28 “Koori” is used to describe an Aboriginal person who comes from New South Wales and Victoria.
a standpoint on Indigenous sovereignty. Being in Indigenous sovereignty Nicoll explains, requires us to understand ongoing Indigenous sovereignty struggles and the racialised nature of Australian historiography. She argues that those who understand the history of Australia, the ongoing violence and failure to engage with sovereign owners, become “exposed to the alienating experience of being subjects of a white nation which denies there ever was a war, let alone that it is continuing”, through knowledge, “the embodied white subject … exists on the ground of race relations rather than hovering above it” (2011: 30). Whiteness is thus a comfortable site of privilege that does not advocate for its citizens to be in Indigenous sovereignty, nor does it welcome change or promote self-reflection. This fait accompli can be countered Nicoll asserts, through acts of Indigenous resistance to white sovereignty and by the enduring presence and agency of Indigenous sovereignty. She claims that Indigenous standpoints provide the space for white subjects to “unlearn” white privilege (2011: 29).

Langton argues that “Australians do not know and relate to Aboriginal people” and she asserts that the “most dense relationship is not between actual people, but between white Australians and the symbols created by their predecessors” (2008: 119). Moreton-Robinson claims that white race privilege needs, “to be owned and challenged by white feminists engaged in anti-racist pedagogy and politics” (2000: 351). This is the space of power and tension, and in order to understand it more fully I now engage with the work of Martin Nakata whose often autobiographical style of theorising sits in contrast to that of white academia: a point illustrated by Nicoll who notes that while the white patriarchy dominates Indigenous affairs, “the first person singular and plural will tend to be conflated with the object rather than the subject of research” (2000: 374). Moreton-Robinson asserts that discourses of whiteness produce ‘knowledges of deficit’ and position Indigenous people as “always lacking” (2008b: 130). Nakata’s autobiographical stance effectively counters dominant ways of knowing.
Lifting the Blanket of Whiteness

Martin Nakata’s scholarship provides the opportunity for non-Indigenous subjects (researchers, educators and the wider population) to include Indigenous Knowledge29 into the everyday. Nakata’s methodology creates space for generating new knowledge and understandings that draw attention to issues which might not have been given prior consideration by the wider population, perspectives that relate to the Australian national flag for example.30 A critical engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander standpoints therefore encourages new knowledge by “bringing in accounts of relations that ‘knowers’ [non-Indigenous people] located in more privileged social positions are not attentive to” (Nakata 2007: 12).31

Colleen McGloin engages with the work of Nakata in an attempt to better understand his call for white Australians to be more self-reflexive. Nakata calls for “non-Indigenous academics to become conversant with his methodologies, and for them to begin engaging at the level of dialogue with the issues he raises in his work” (McGloin 2009: 36). McGloin argues for non-Indigenous academics to connect with Nakata’s methodologies in order to understand “how to embed Indigenous knowledge into academic disciplines, curricula … and by extension, into public discourse” (2009: 40). McGloin also notes the value of experiential knowledge as a pedagogical tool. The importance of experiential pedagogy is twofold, not only is it an effective tool to teach non-Indigenous people, but, as Nakata argues, it is also a way to “do” Indigenous Knowledge, “Indigenous epistemological basis of knowledge construction

29 Capital letters are used in keeping with Nakata’s work. Nakata notes Indigenous Knowledge with an upper case ‘K’ is used to identify with an epistemological understanding of knowledge systems; a lower case ‘k’ identifies fragmented articles of a knowledge system (2002).
30 See Appendix B.
31 Over the course of my research I found that when I discussed my work with non-Indigenous friends or peers I received a consistent response, which in effect stated, “I have never thought about the national flag in terms of what it might mean to Indigenous people.”
and the ways of “doing” knowledge are … in ways of story-telling, of memory-making, in narrative, art and performance …” (Nakata 2007: 10). For non-Indigenous researchers, Nakata’s approach to race theory provides a basis for the real, lived realities of Indigenous subjects to teach the on-going effects of colonial racism.

Nakata deconstructs Western structures of knowledge production in order to explore the duality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous systems of thought and knowledge. The deconstruction of western ways of ‘knowing’ provides a means to challenge dominant discourses and discriminatory representations. Nakata initially argued against the principle of marginalised people explaining their life experience to the wider population, he questioned, “why people from dominant groups couldn’t understand my position by reflecting on their own actions” (1993: 53). A lack of self-reflection further skews power towards non-Indigenous people. If viewpoints of the dominant group are considered normative then they ‘naturally’ require no comment, in contrast counter-perspectives inevitably attract attention and therefore demand explanation. As a means to counter dominant ways of ‘knowing’, personal experience is employed to “bring home very powerfully the implications and effects that flow on to peoples lives from institutional and governmental practice” (Nakata 1993: 53). Nakata asserts, “I choose to inter-weave my personal story into my more academic work, rather than abide by Western academic or literary protocols” (2008b: 135). Nakata’s perceptions of the white world are based on his life experience and family history, which result in, “what is now a very political and critical stand that I take towards academic work” (1993: 56). And he states, “you can see why my standpoint must necessarily be differently located from the standpoint of western

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32 Nicoll testifies, reading Ruby Langford Ginibi’s Don’t Take Your Love to Town, she explains, “I expected to consume an autobiography but instead found myself encountering a text that was a revelation of the harsh realities of Indigenous existence and an injunction to do something about them” (2000: 370).
educators …” (1993: 61). At the intersection of Indigenous and western domains, lies a complicated space of tension and conflict, theorised by Nakata as the “cultural interface”.

The cultural interface is a site of both friction and potential productivity that provides a way to understand the very real and polarised ambiits of western and Indigenous epistemologies. Nakata conceptualises the cultural interface as the beginning point which considers how,

Knowledge systems as they operate in people’s daily lives will interact, develop, change, and transform. It accepts that all Knowledge systems are culturally-embedded, dynamic, respond to changing circumstances and constantly evolve. It is not strictly about the replacement of one with the other, nor the undermining of one by the other. It is about maintaining the continuity of one when having to harness another and working the interaction in ways that serve Indigenous interests, in ways that can uphold distinctiveness and special status as First peoples (2002: 286).

Nakata draws attention here to the cultural interface as a site of potential change, based on an understanding and experience of colonialism and its effects on Indigenous people in the everyday, and the need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ knowledge to be afforded an equal and respected status.

Theoretical Approach

Discourse Analysis

I want to unravel the national flag’s capacity for imparting particular types of knowledge about who or what we are, or who we can be or might be in terms of national identity. The flag as a textual symbol creates a very particular reality in Australian public life. However, its meanings are not fixed: on the contrary, the flag undergoes many transformations in its efforts to (re)invigorate national sentiment. These are not renovations of the flag itself, but of its uses and applications, the debates, statements and discussions which keep it alive. Despite sporadic and what appear momentary shifts in the discourses surrounding the flag, in
its current form, the national flag maintains a particular set of colonial meanings which carry
with it the material presence of knowledge systems, founded on racial, religious and cultural
superiority.

Discourse analysis reveals how dominant values and knowledges can be (re)produced
and (re)distributed with uncanny ease. As Foucault ascertains, “… there is no knowledge
without a particular discursive practice; and any discursive practice may be defined by the
knowledge that it forms” (1997: 183). White has argued that in Australia knowledge production
was inextricably linked with relations of power and reciprocity, this in turn defined hegemonic
values and sustained notions of what is accepted as true or false. Foucault identifies these
systems of thought as being located in the fields of general history, the analysis of which,

seeks to discover that whole domain of institutions, economic processes, and social
relations on which a discursive formation can be articulated; it tries to show how the
autonomy of discourse and its specificity nevertheless do not give it the status of pure
ideality and total historical independence; what it wishes to uncover is the particular
level in which history can give place to definite types of discourse, which have their
own type of historicity, and which are related to a whole set of various historicities

Drawing from Foucault I will identify the sets of statements which accrue around the
national flag in its many and varied contexts in order to discover not only its primary and
obvious intentions, but also to reveal its capabilities for exclusion. Discursive practices in the
Foucauldian sense are the foundation upon which bodies of knowledge emerge. They are the
organising principles of an episteme and play an active role in determining both language and
thoughts. These principles form the basis from which knowledge about objects of inquiry come
into being and how, once inserted into discourse, what we ‘know’ becomes ‘naturalised’,
unquestioned and certified as ‘truth’. Foucault alerts us to follow,

the thread of analogies and symbols, [to] rediscover a thematic that is more imaginary
than discursive, more affective than rational, and less close to the concept than to desire;
its force animates the most opposed figures, but only to melt them at once into a slowly
transformable unity; what one discovers is a plastic continuity, the movement of a meaning that is embodied in various representations, images, and metaphors (1997: 150).

In deploying a Foucauldian analysis of the discourses that construct and maintain nationalism, I will simultaneously consider the opposing episteme of Indigenous knowledge to counter the embedded hegemonic understandings in the national flag. When considering oppositional ways of knowing, I will attempt not only to deconstruct some of the powerful symbolism of the national flag, but also to foreground the possibility for a counter discourse that emphasises a different conception of flag and nation based on some of the philosophical principles of inclusion and cooperation that have ensured the enduringness of Indigenous cultures. The “representations, images and metaphors” of the national flag are its textual symbols, and they transmit various messages, including those of whiteness and national exclusion.

**Banal Nationalism**

Billig’s concept of “banal nationalism” makes it possible to theorise the ways in which members of established democratic nations are unconsciously enculturated with national identity on a daily basis. Billig’s application of the word ‘banal’ ought not to be confused with meaning harmless or trite. On the contrary banal nationalism in this context refers to an insidious and pervasive practice. Banal nationalism maintains and (re)produces national identity through widespread and commonplace ideologies and habits, “[I]n routine practices and everyday discourses, especially those in the mass media, the idea of nationhood is regularly flagged” (Billig 2013: 154). Banal nationalism’s focus is on the unconscious aspects of nationalism; reading a newspaper or listening to the weather for example, are so routine that they draw no attention. Billig argues, “the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations. However, this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding” (2013: 8).
Billig draws attention to how the nation is routinely flagged via the sports pages of newspapers, “[E]very day, the world over, millions upon millions of men scan these pages, sharing in defeats and victories, feeling at home in this world of waved flags” (2013: 122). Billig notes the extant relationship between sport, war and masculinity. He argues that the bonds created through sport helps to prepare citizens to be ‘armed’ and ready to fight for the protection of their nation, “[O]n foreign fields, the men win their trophies, or lose their honour, doing battle on the nation’s behalf” (Billig 2013: 122-123). Sport, he argues, not only echoes warfare, but is a symbol from which to understand war. Metaphors of war are frequently deployed in sporting commentary: ‘charging’, ‘shooting’, ‘attacking’ and ‘firing’. Routine reminders which serve to prepare the populace for future conflict, when “our country needs us to do-or-die. The call will already be familiar; the obligations have been primed; their words have long been installed in the territory of our pleasure” (Billig 2013: 125).

Banal nationalism co-exists, and most significantly, underpins the more conscious, readily recognised forms of nationalism. In other words, the banal signifiers of national identity fortify the more visible aspects of nationalism which emerge on national days and in times of crises (Skey 2009). Apart from brief, overt outbursts, nationalism in established western nations is conceptualised as a phenomenon which usually belongs to emerging nations and is thus considered to be emotionally and politically charged. Understanding nationalism in this way is deceptive and has been facilitated by an abundance of historical literature and imagery focusing on the triumphant establishment of nations across the world. Theories of nationalism have thus entered the realm of ‘common sense’, where taken-for-granted assumptions about the naturalness of nations presides. Billig claims that nationalism is a form of social life which needs to be believed in and replicated on a daily basis in order for the nation to be (re)produced, and he argues, “[N]ationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition” (2013: 6).
Billig’s work on national flags distinguishes between flags that are consciously waved and saluted, and flags which are not. Waved flags are traditionally associated with nationalism and habitually demand an outward show of emotion. In contrast, unsaluted and unwaved flags demand little or no attention. Billig asserts that of all the signifiers, it is the unwaved flag which is the metonymic image of banal nationalism. Unwaved flags are tacit symbols which litter the subconscious landscape as they routinely ‘flag’ the nation. Unwaved flags adorn the everyday. They are found on flagpoles scattered throughout the land and are highly adaptable. I have seen the national flag on shop fronts, stationery, clothes, linen, trucks, cars, footwear, jewellery, tattoos, on greeting cards, exercise books and electronic devices. The unwaved flag “attracts no special attention. It belongs to no special, sociological genus. Having no name, it cannot be identified as a problem” (Billig 2013: 6). This statement establishes that a relationship exists between the flag and the populace which appears to be unproblematic.

Unwaved flags as banal reminders of nationhood meld into the cultural landscape and as Palmer notes, they work to “gently remind people of who they are rather than leap out with flashing lights, brass bands and calls to defend the nation” (1998: 181). The proliferation of routine ‘flaggings’ assures the national flag’s place in the Australian landscape as a symbol whose very power lies in its inconspicuous insertion into the everyday The pervasiveness of unwaved flags, adorning such a vast range of everyday cultural paraphernalia, comprise perhaps the most crucial component of national indoctrination. In other words, I would suggest, in their seeming unobtrusiveness lies their proselytising force.

Drawing on and extending Billig’s thesis not only highlights the ways that citizens are indoctrinated with national ideals on a daily basis, but also provides a framework from which to hypothesise the reasons why non-Indigenous debates which surround the national flag routinely fail to incorporate Indigenous perspectives. Billig argues that scholars, in particular social scientists, have frequently overlooked the banal reproduction of national ideals, “[T]he
gaps in language, which enable banal nationalism to be forgotten, are also gaps in theoretical discourse” (2013: 8). In order to rectify this neglect Billig calls upon social scientists to “distance ourselves from ourselves and from that which we routinely accept as obvious or ‘natural’” (2013: 15). This means, as a non-Indigenous researcher I must critically engage with nationalism and whiteness as an ideological force that permeates all discourses and is encoded in sets of practices which regulate the body politic according to principles of same / Other, them / us. These are principles which demand constant repetition in order that ‘we’ know who ‘we’ are and what ‘we’ stand for. Challenging the assumptions associated with the ‘naturalness’ of nationalism opens up debates about legitimacy. In Australia the continent was taken without consent or a treaty, as a result, “the Australian nation-state has a legitimacy problem that remains unresolved” (Brennan et al 2005: 5).

As banal nationalism has been neglected by scholars, Billig asserts that the unwaved flags have been neglected by the citizenry, “… flags each day hang limply in public places. These reminders of nationhood hardly register in the flow of daily attention, as citizens rush past on their daily business” (2013: 38). Butz (2009) argues that banal or pervasive flag display may be responsible for an unconscious and automated increase in feelings of national belonging for some, but not for others. Crucially, he states “repeated exposure to symbols that threaten racial identity may have important implications for psychological well-being” (2009: 794). Butz’ hypothesis correlates with those articulated by Indigenous leaders. Parliamentarian Linda Burney, for example claims,

I do find it difficult, and have always found it difficult to accept that Union Jack in the corner, and my view is that wouldn’t it be wonderful to have an Australian flag that represents the colours and the diversity and the depth and the ancientness of people in this country (qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 24).
Anthony Mundine, a boxer and activist is committed to uniting Australia. He states that the Union Jack

symbolises the invasion, the murder, the pillaging, and on and on. I think we need to address that – it’s dividing Australia, rather than uniting Australia … At the moment, I can’t fly it. And I want to fly the Australian flag. I want to fly it for the Australian people. But let’s do it together (qtd. in Jackson 2012: 7).

Lead singer of Yothu Yindi, Mandawuy Yunupingu was an Elder and educator who worked tirelessly in the fight against white Australian racism. Yunupingu is remembered by his brother, Djungatjunga Yunupingu, who acknowledges that “his brother was a rock star, but more importantly an advocate of reconciliation and education equality who wanted one flag for Australia” (Johnston 2013: 5). At Yunupingu’s memorial an Indigenous elder stated, “[L]et us all raise one flag, so we can all call Australia home” (qtd. in ABC News 2013b). Burney, Mundine and Yunupingu testify that the Australian national flag in its current formation disallows notions of national belonging and ‘unity’. Eriksen argues that if a country is largely homogenous then the national flag may ‘unify’ at the cost of “categorically excluding the minorities” (2007: 5). It could be argued that the Australian flag “categorically” excludes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who comprise three per cent of the population, as the flags’ colonial imagery, values and status remain ineluctably woven into the fabric of the white Australian nation.

Findings from an American study indicate that an axiomatic relationship between American-ness and whiteness influences a diverse range of perceptions which surround the American national flag. Using Billig’s thesis of banal nationalism, Manuel Madriaga (2007) explores the significance of the American Flag 33 in determining which members of the community are included or excluded. This study is useful, however, it is important to note that

33 In keeping with Madriaga’s work I use a capital ‘F’ when writing about the American Flag.
it has its limitations. Of the 25 respondents 10 were white, 9 were black and 6 were Latino. All were male military veterans. Madriaga notes that a similar study could be undertaken in the United Kingdom, “where people of colour stand out as not being British” (2007: 67). Madriaga claims that national symbols displayed on a daily basis are a persistent reminder of the extant boundaries found within the populace. National symbols transmit notions of ‘us’ and ‘them, signals of identity which, Madriaga argues, have racial overtones. Madriaga also asserts that there is an official or public face of the Flag which in theory binds all Americans together, irrespective of race or ethnicity. It is this face of the Flag in which whiteness goes unmarked and unnoticed which,

makes it difficult for people of colour to participate meaningfully within the American collective. Their subjectivities are restrained and hidden in private behind ‘white masks’. Being racialised and having to wear a ‘white mask’ in public can skew one’s attachment to the symbolic ideal of the Flag (Madriaga 2007: 54 emphasis in the original).

In Madriaga’s study, the black respondents demonstrated an attachment to the American Flag, yet their responses were influenced by issues of race and injustice. One respondent states, “… to me, the American Flag means freedom, freedom of expression even though it has a lot of flaws in race relations and stuff like that …” (2007: 59). Madriaga notes the black respondents all “straddle the public and private faces of the American Flag, where senses of similarity (us) and difference (them) go hand-in-hand” (2007: 59). This was not the case for the white respondents, all of whom shared an “attachment to a past in which the Flag was praised and its symbolic significance was not questioned” (Madriaga 2007: 57). Madriaga finds that for the white respondents race was not an issue, and notions of whiteness were absent, “[T]heir interpretations [of the Flag] were ‘race’-neutral, leaving ‘whiteness’ unmarked” (2007: 56). Madriaga demonstrates that there is an indicative link between whiteness, the Flag and American-ness. For the white respondents, there was no apparent link between the Flag,
and racial difference. However, non-white respondents were compelled to “discuss their racial and ethnic distinctiveness while discussing their allegiance to the Flag. By doing so, they not only flag their Otherness. They also flag ‘whiteness’ in notions of American-ness” (Madriaga 2007: 67).

In Australia racism in favour of whites tends to go unremarked, as returning to Foley demonstrates,

we need to remember that the concept of Australia as a nation is greater than the sum of its individuals and communal parts. It includes also our particular way of life, which is directly connected to our British heritage, whether we are black or white and whether we like it or not.

A national flag is symbolic of the cohesion which exists between those individuals and communities and represents the collective ethic that has developed over time. Thus, we need to take care that we do not lose sight of the essence of the nation in the quest to satisfy and recognise particular groups within it (1996a: 196).

Foley states that the Australian nation and British heritage are synonymous. She cautions against losing sight, or perhaps letting go of this “essence”. By urging us not to “satisfy and recognise particular groups” within the nation, Foley seeks to assimilate all to the collective ethic of “our British heritage”. By failing to recognise white Australians as a “particular group” Foley confirms Madriaga’s findings. She conceives white Australians, and by default the flag, as being raceless.

In her discussion of the Australian national flag Foley recognises that the “feelings” of Indigenous people are fundamental when considering to retain or reject the Union Jack. Foley recognises that the Union Jack must be a “positive affront” for Indigenous people, some of whom consider the Union Jack to be the “Butcher’s Apron” as it “is covered with the blood of the dispossessed Aboriginal people” (1996a: 98). This horrific analogy, Foley argues, must
surely be reason enough to dispense with the Union Jack. However, to counter this argument she states,

[W]hile it is undeniably true that the Union Jack symbolises British invasion and dispossession, it is also true that it symbolises a political and judicial system that now enables the Aboriginal people to voice their grievances openly without fear of reprisal and with the definite hope that their grievances will be addressed (1996a: 98).

What Foley fails to consider are the systems of governance which were in existence and had flourished for millennia before Cook. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations were sophisticated, sacred and sustainable, as evidenced by the Encounters: Revealing Stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Objects from the British Museum exhibition.34 The objects on display, including the Gweagal shield and spears taken by either Cook or Banks at Kurnell, were on loan, returned to Australia for the first time since 1770. June Oscar, states that the artefacts,

...draw attention to the unsettled and emergent dialogue that is ever unfolding between our Indigenous nation’s claims to self-determination and sovereignty, which we have never relinquished, and the Australian nation-state’s imposed governmental and legislative authority over the entire continent (2015: 26).

From Foley’s perspective however, it is evident that whiteness is the considered norm; the platform from which opinions and practices surrounding the national flag and its nation are justified.35

34 Encounters was held at the National Museum Canberra from 27 November 2015 to 28 March 2016.
35 Browsing Canberra’s Parliament House gift shop in September 2015 I noted copies of Foley’s book (1996) were for sale and on prominent display at the service desk.
Conclusion

The various approaches to analysis discussed in this chapter will be deployed throughout the thesis. Understanding the relationships between nation, whiteness and identity makes visible the scope and scale in which citizens are shaped in everyday life. As the epigraph details, the deployment of banal nationalism is imperative to the national agenda as it underpins the more common understandings of nationalism and facilitates with ease its (re)production.

Bhabha notes that people form “a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference: their claim to be representative provokes a crisis within the process of signification and discursive address” (1994: 208). The replication of the nation emerges from a diverse, but hegemonic, range of routine practices, symbols and everyday discourses. Billig comments, “[N]ational identities are rooted within a powerful social structure, which reproduces hegemonic relations of inequity” (2013: 175). “… hegemonic relations of inequity” are mirrored in the Australian national flag, where under the guise of history, sentiment and tradition we find whiteness, nation and identity inextricably woven into its fabric. Clearly national symbols have the potential to impede feelings of identity and belonging. With this in mind, and in order to develop a more in-depth understanding of the parasitic relationship which binds nation and symbol, I now turn my attention to the creation of the modern nation. Through the work of various theorists of nation and nationalism, I discuss what the modern nation is and how it was created.
CHAPTER THREE: Whose Nation Australia?

Today, nearly all my people live in shambling, broken-down places with poor houses, poor roads, bad schools, little or no health care, with whitefella in a welfare industry who service us when they can, if they want. We are captives of welfare, which means we are wards of the state relying on handouts from public servants to get by, and therefore our lives are controlled by governments and public servants who can do what they want, when they feel like it. And people suffer from their neglect - just look at our communities and the lives too many of our people are forced to endure. Although the wealth of the Australian nation has been taken from our soil, our communities and homelands bear no resemblance to the great towns and metropolises of the modern Australian nation.

(Galarrwuy Yunupingu 2008: 39-40).

Introduction

The modern western nation was forged during an era of political and social unrest. The years between 1700 and 1914 saw agricultural, industrial, political and scientific revolutions sweep through Europe. These revolutions were the catalyst for change out of which the dominating framework of “the West” emerged. Western principles were then dispersed across the globe as Europe claimed vast areas for itself through colonisation. This was the era of European domination. It was a time of discovery and power which began to cement the idea of nation as a western stronghold of superior order. Edward Said claims,

… so far as the West was concerned during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an assumption had been made that the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West (2003: 40-41).

36 Three political revolutions are considered to be landmarks for the beginning of the modern political era: the English Revolution 1688-1689, the American Revolution 1776-1783, and the French Revolution 1789-1799. All three events changed the history of the world and are considered ‘true’ revolutions because they transferred power from some people to others, either by force or the threat of force (Roberts 1985). The English and American Revolutions focused on questions of sovereignty, and the need to defend existing legal, practical and customary freedoms. The English Revolution resulted in one monarch being replaced by another. The American Revolution was more forceful. The deposition of the monarchy resulted in the establishment of a republic, and in 1783 the British were forced to recognise the independence of the United States of America. The French Revolution was different. It occurred at a time when the French monarchy was powerful on the international stage. However, it took place in a country where many conditions of the Middle Ages were still prevalent. This revolution ended feudalism and the privileges enjoyed by nobles and Church leaders alike. It reformed administration, provided education and equality for the people. The French Revolution showed the world a new way of thinking about the possibilities of social change and “identified politics as the proper instrument for achieving such change, for challenging and infringing vested rights and interests” (Roberts 1985: 284-285).
In 1815, Europe had colonised approximately 35 percent of the world. By 1914, this figure had increased to 85 percent (Said 2003). The modern Australian nation was officially created during this time as the British Parliament passed legislation permitting Australia to govern as an independent nation. On 1 January 1901, the six British colonies federated and became the Commonwealth of Australia. In Part One of this chapter I engage with a range of theorists who provide various ways of understanding how and why the modern nation evolved. These have been selected according to their usefulness in providing a comprehensive understanding of the formation of the modern nation, and also, for their ability to impart a more cogent view of Australia’s construction as a colonised nation-state. In Part Two, I proffer a counter discourse of what constitutes nation through the perspectives of Aboriginal theorists, leaders and community Elders who question the legitimacy of the Australian nation state.

**PART ONE: The Creation of the Modern Nation**

**Ernest Renan**

In 1882 Ernest Renan delivered a lecture in France titled *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation*? (*What is a nation?*). Renan asserts that it was the French Revolution which allowed France to own the concept of nationality, “[W]e should not be displeased if others imitate us in this. It was we who founded the principle of nationality” (1990: 12). With the rise of French nationalism came the associated symbols of the French Revolution: the French national flag and national anthem, “La Marseillaise” were both adopted in 1794 and are recognised as being the source for national flags and anthems as we know them today.\(^{37}\) In his quest to identify what a nation is, Renan hypothesises that in themselves, language, religion and geography are insufficient explanations. He speculates that nations such as France, England, Germany and Russia will continue for centuries as individual historical units, no matter what will befall them, “the crucial pieces on a chequerboard whose squares will forever vary in importance and size

\(^{37}\) Exceptions to this are the Dutch flag (see Chapter Five) and British national anthem.
but will never be wholly confused with each other” (1990: 9). If on one hand, geography, religion and language do not fully explain what a nation is, yet on the other, the assertion can be made that nations such as England, Russia, France and Germany will remain as individual units for centuries to come, one therefore has to consider what the other components are, in order to fully understand the phenomenon of the modern Western nation-state.

Language and race, Renan notes, invite people to unite but do not compel them to. Renan claims that languages are historical formations and race should have no applications in politics, “to make politics depend upon ethnographic analysis is to surrender it to a chimera” (1990: 14). An excessive preoccupation with language and race, Renan asserts, is fraught with danger,

Such exaggerations enclose one within a specific culture, considered as national; one limits oneself, one hems oneself in. One leaves the heady air that one breathes in the vast field of humanity in order to enclose oneself in a conventicle with one’s compatriots. Nothing could be worse for the mind; nothing could be more disturbing for civilization (1990: 17).

Renan promotes the importance of diversity as he argues against monocultures. Renan’s belief that nationality can no longer be defined by religion draws attention to the fact that in the modern nation, theological dogma has been replaced by a ‘state religion’. Examples of this new religion include what Renan calls the “cult of the flag” (1990:17). This analogy is corroborated by Smith who states “as the highest expression of nationality, the flag is likely to be the center of a cult, replacing the king or high priest who received adulation in prenationalist days” (1975: 56). Renan argues that to reject the “cult” is akin to a refusal to engage in military conscription. Through Renan’s work, we begin to understand how a simple piece of cloth has the power to amalgamate citizen to state.

Renan contends that historical error is crucial to nation building. This argument is compounded by his assertion that the analysis of history has the potential to undermine the
principle of nationhood, “[I]ndeed, historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations” (1990: 11). According to this standpoint, a collective forgetting about violence is a necessary tenet from which national stability and social cohesion can be established. Renan notes the importance of community bonds and geographical features but he states, they are not enough to define a nation,

“[M]ore valuable by far than common customs posts and frontiers conforming to strategic ideas is the fact of sharing, in the past, a glorious heritage and regrets, and of having, in the future, [a shared] programme to put into effect, or the fact of having suffered, enjoyed, and hoped together. These are the kinds of things that can be understood in spite of differences of race and language … suffering in common unifies more than joy does. Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort (1990: 19).

Following Renan, the importance of truth-telling and addressing “national memories” is significant in that this provides a framework for acknowledgement and responsibility from which a colonising culture might begin to rectify the wrongs of its past.

Renan likens the nation to a soul, a spiritual principle consisting of two elements; one lies in the past and the other in the present. The former refers to a collective legacy of national memories, which, when combined with the latter, create “the essential conditions for being a people” (1990: 19). It is here, in Renan’s discussion of the present, that he introduces the concept of ‘will’ and ‘consent’: “the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form” (1990: 19). Renan’s formula for nation-building constructs the nation according to a set of what he sees as ethical principles founded on inclusion, consent, and sharing, where recognising the wrongs of the past, as well as the successes, and considering the future as a ‘shared’ endeavour are fundamental to nation building.

Ernest Gellner

Ernest Gellner ranks as one of the most influential theorists of the nation (Bosworth 2007; Sutherland 2012). Gellner’s work on nationalism,
still represents the single most important attempt to provide a theory of nationalism as a whole. It is one grounded in an overall vision of human history and an insistence on the uniqueness of the modern world (Breuilly qtd. in Gellner 2006: liii).

In *Nations and Nationalism* (1988) Gellner establishes that nationalism emerged not only from the throes of revolution and colonisation but also as a response to a population explosion in a rapidly urbanising world. In order to sustain economic growth a labour force was required that needed to be both mobile and literate. As a result, education became a state responsibility and an obligatory norm. Under these conditions the ubiquitous role of the state flourished and with the establishment of pervasive “high cultures” (standardised literacy and education-based communication systems) nations began to be conceptualised and defined in terms of culture, which constitute very nearly the only kind of unit with which men willingly and often ardently identify. The cultures now seem to be the natural repositories of political legitimacy … under these conditions only, nations can indeed be defined in terms both of will and of culture, and indeed in terms of the convergence of them both with political units. In these conditions, men will to be politically united with all those, and only those, who share their culture. Polities then will to extend their boundaries to the limits of their cultures, and to protect and impose their culture within the boundaries of their power. The fusion of will, culture and polity becomes the norm, and one not easily or frequently defied (Gellner 1988: 55 emphasis in the original).

When the modern Australian nation was born, colonial values, “will, culture and polity” fused to become an indomitable force. Prior to 1900 there was no actual nation of “Australia”, there were six colonies: New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, and Tasmania. All were governed by Britain as separate countries. After a ten year debate the colonies federated, and on 1 January 1901 the Commonwealth of Australia was proclaimed, “Australia was the first nation in history to vote itself into existence” (Hartcher 2017: 30). At this time, 98 percent of the population was white. In order to maintain the status quo, and to protect Australia from perceived threats, the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, known as the White Australia Policy was implemented. The alignment of Commonwealth and
culture was substantiated by the nation’s political agenda. The White Australia Policy was not officially abolished until 1973, the official authority of white rule was thus inscribed in a binding legal statute until then, to echo Gellner, “[I]t is precisely by binding things together that traditional visions perpetuate themselves and the prejudgements contained within them” (1988: 22).

Gellner states that nationalism is “the external manifestation of a deep adjustment in the relationship between polity and culture” (1988: 35). Nationalism’s strength lies in its ability to be routinely accepted as a natural phenomenon, and when the principles of nationalism combine, only then the nation is created,

[N]ations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent though long-delayed political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: that is a reality, for better or worse, and in general an inescapable one (Gellner 1988: 48-49 emphasis in the original).

Gellner argues that formal exclusion is a central tenet of nationalism upon which political legitimacy relies. Australia’s “political legitimacy” has been established by the socio-legal exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Indigenous people have been systematically excluded from all political processes and were not given citizenship rights until 1962, nor counted in the census (which has been held every five years since 1911), until 1967. As I write, nearly 120 years after Federation, Indigenous people have yet to be ‘recognised’ in the Australian Constitution, and repeated calls for a treaty, or treaties, remain unanswered. Understanding the historical realities which constructed the Australian nation, reveals how “a dominant identity generates an image that fosters ‘sameness’ and ‘otherness’, inclusion and exclusion, presence and absence” (Behrendt 2003: 56). It is also through the process of acknowledging colonial history that I can begin to understand the force of the nation’s most strident emblem, to borrow from Gellner, “it is by insisting on prising things apart that we have liberated ourselves from them” (1988: 22).
**Eric Hobsbawm**

Eric Hobsbawm, a British Marxist historian is renowned for his work on nationalism. He identifies the nation as a modern and historically recent phenomenon. Hobsbawm asserts that nationalism precedes the nation and is in principle a set of relations between national and political units. The modern nation, shaped during the era of the French Revolution, is understood by Hobsbawm as being multi-faceted, a place where territory, politics and social aspirations intersect. After the revolution, politics were democratised and the allegiance once afforded to secular or religious rulers was no longer guaranteed. The people demanded to be heard, and through their elected state representatives they had a voice. In return, the state needed the people for both money and protection which was obtained by way of taxes and soldiers. Over time, agents of the state became more invasive and infiltrated every stratum of society,

> [I]n the course of the nineteenth century these interventions became so universal and so routinized in ‘modern’ states that a family would have to live in some very inaccessible place … not to come into regular contact with the national state and its agents (Hobsbawm 1995: 80-81).

Agents of the state were employed at schools, post offices, railways, and in the police and military forces ensuring regular contact with the people. Their powers were reinforced through compulsory primary school attendance, military conscription and the keeping of state records. The everyday practices that took place between state and citizen shaped society in multiple ways; from birth to death the citizenry was regulated to prescribed national ‘norms’ that would count, record and manage their everyday lives, “[G]overnment and subject or citizen were inevitably linked by daily bonds, as never before” (Hobsbawm 1995: 81).

This was a time of social restructure, a time to create, “to ‘educate our masters’, to ‘make Italians’, to turn ‘peasants into Frenchmen’ and attach all to nation and flag” (Hobsbawm 1995: 91). Social changes coincided with emerging notions of race which sustained ideologies of racial supremacy. It was during these times that,
the citizens of a country became a sort of community, though an imagined one, and its members therefore found themselves seeking for, and consequently finding, things in common, places, practices, personages, memories, signs and symbols (Hobsbawm 1995: 90).

The states used their influence to communicate with their citizens particularly through primary schools, “to spread the image and heritage of the ‘nation’ and to inculcate attachment to it and to attach all to country and flag …” (Hobsbawm 1995: 91). Towards the end of the nineteenth century Hobsbawm asserts that nationalism’s basic loyalty was “not to ‘the country’, but only to its particular version of that country: to an ideological construct” (1995: 93).

Hobsbawm identifies Australia as a nation-state “whose specific national characteristics and criteria of nationhood have been established since the late eighteenth century” (1995: 78). Since this time public symbols and ceremonies have been created to produce a sense of nation-ness which supported the colonial agenda. Through the indoctrination of shared beliefs and like-minded values, a diverse population coheres in an illusion of unity. Through various institutions and mediums, national values and beliefs are discursively fostered and transmitted. Nationalism is thus fabricated through a regime of social engineering, and through the invention and use of artefacts.38 Supporting Renan’s argument, Hobsbawm argues that nations have been created by historical error and that nationalist historians have falsely documented their nation’s story. In other words, “[N]ationalism requires too much belief in what is patently not so” (Hobsbawm 1995: 12). Hobsbawm contends that nations are a “dual phenomena, constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood unless also analysed from below” (1995: 10).

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38 Australian nationalism is currently in the process of being both re-imagined and re-constructed. In April 2017 the Coalition Turnbull government proposed tightening eligibility for Australian citizenship with the introduction of a more rigorous English language and Australian values citizenship test.
Benedict Anderson argues that nation, nationality and nationalism are social structures, the result of historical events which when merged with political and ideological forces, command “profound emotional legitimacy” (1991: 4). Anderson proposes that the nation is “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (1991: 6). It is “imagined” because of the impossibility for the members of the nation to ever connect with or know their fellow compatriots, “yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1991: 6). It is imagined as “limited” because every nation, no matter its size, has “finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations” (1991: 7). It is imagined as “sovereign” because the concept of the nation was created in the age of Enlightenment and Revolution at a time when the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained hierarchical dynasty was fiercely contested. The resulting sovereign state is the “gage and emblem of this freedom” (1991: 7). The nation is imagined as a “community” because it is perceived to provide “deep, horizontal comradeship” despite the reality of inequality and exploitation (1991: 7). The power of nation-ness, Anderson claims “is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time” (1991: 3).

Historically speaking the events and consequences of British settlement in Australia are recent and they occurred at a time of great social and political change. For example, with the onset of the American Revolution the British could no longer transport their convicts to the American colonies and required another repository to house its burgeoning ‘criminal’ population. Australia was thus established as a British penal colony yet colonisation was also driven by Britain’s desire for land and its potential wealth. The Australian nation was forged out of colonising acts and the imposition of social, political, economic and legal structures that were founded on British principles; ‘Australia’ thus evolved to command “profound emotional legitimacy”.

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Anderson argues that once the nation has been constructed in the imagination it is then plied, manipulated and transformed through repeated messages inscribed in the national consciousness which inspire a “love” of nation. Anderson states that devotion is captured from national subjects via “[T]he cultural products of nationalism – poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts – show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles” (1991: 141). Anderson’s insight into cultural artefacts highlights how they work to attach citizens to nation. Anderson makes it clear that there is a diverse, yet relentless, bombardment directed at national citizens to ensure they do not, or cannot, forget who they are and where they belong. This fundamental principle of nationalism is addressed in the following chapter.

**Australia: the ‘imagi-nation’**

There is a substantial amount of evidence pointing to the various foundations of nation-making. Despite critiques of Anderson’s work, many theorists have built on the concept of an “imagined community” to explore the exigencies of modern-day nation building. Billig argues it is the imagined nation which gives nationalism a “strong social psychological dimension” that “is part of a wider ideological, discursive consciousness” (2013: 10). White claims similarly that “Australia’ for the most part is something we carry around in our heads” (1997: 13). Sarah Maddison adds, “Australia, exists more in the hearts and minds of its citizens than it does in any constitution or parliament” (2011: 23). Australia, as an “imagined political community”, is channelled through the minds of like-minded citizens who hold fast to notions of shared experiences and have or have not comparable values and aspirations. In other words, the concept of shared or national values so often cited in these times in relation to revised citizenship requirements, for example, is able to seamlessly incorporate notions of dissent as expressions of democratic standards. This broadening of the “imagined community” can be

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39 For example Konstantin Sietzy (n.d) argues that pre-modern communities were just as likely to be imagined as modern nations.
tightened at will to exclude if expressions of difference exceed the imaginary possibilities of those who orchestrate the nation’s values.

Maddison claims that white Australians are challenged and disturbed by that which unsettles the comfortable notions of their imagined community. They prefer not to confront the violent way in which the modern Australian nation was created as the realities of colonisation produce feelings of national insecurity and a lingering collective guilt. These anxieties have been transmitted inter-generationally and are fortified “by a form of defensive nationalism that will not allow an honest attempt to redress past wrongs” (Maddison 2011: 24). Defensive nationalism is procured by a strong desire to protect the hegemonic imaginings of Australia and it shields like-minded citizens from both responsibility and action. Expressions of defensive nationalism are seen as hostile by Maddison, who alerts us to the flag-waving hysteria of Australia Day\(^\text{40}\) which she claims, given its chosen date is an incongruous attempt to reinforce positive notions of Australian-ness. Historical denialism, another form of defensive nationalism is “a tool of racial politics” (Beresford 2012: 332; see also Renan 1990; Hobsbawm 1995). Historical denialism continues to inform the national imagining, and, following Billig, must be understood as part of Australia’s “wider ideological, discursive consciousness”. Moreton-Robinson states that the manipulation of history and historical denial serve to legitimise the argument that “there was no theft, no war and no need to have a treaty” (2007: 100).

Australian national identity is inseparably linked to its colonial history, its myths and imaginings which are bolstered by celebratory national dates and symbols. To challenge them is contentious. As Maddison notes, there is a price to pay for questioning national mythologies which, she argues, can incur the label of being “un-Australian” (2011: 34). To be labelled ‘un-

\(^{40}\) 26 January is known as “Australia Day”, it marks the arrival of the First Fleet who landed in 1788 and established a British penal colony. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people this day is known as “Invasion Day” or “Survival Day”, and is a day of profound grief and sadness.
Australian’ is to be marked by the inherent penalty of social exclusion; to be ‘un-Australian’ is to be outside of the body politic. In contrast, she argues that Australians who choose an identity “saturated” by colonial history “continue to stand in solidarity with past generations and the crimes they have committed” (2011: 28). Maddison draws attention here to the importance of our present day responses to the past, and her thinking can be transferred to our present day responses to the flag.

National imaginings have long been a fundamental driver in the creation of the Australian nation, and the national flag has been “saturated” accordingly. In its current formation the national flag promotes a colonial identity and a white history. Despite professed claims of ‘unity’, the national flag remains a territorial signifier in the ongoing battlefield of Australian identity: it stridently separates ‘us’ from ‘them’. To connect with and broaden our understandings of the concepts of ‘Australia’ and Australian national identity allows new ways for the nation to be re-imagined. For Kayleen Malthouse and Terry O’Shane a re-imagined Australia, with Constitutional recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for example, conjures,

an opportunity to make this land of the fair go truly fair for all Australians. We have the opportunity to change for the better the way we do business in Indigenous affairs … so that all our grandchildren grow up in a better and fairer Australia (2017: 24).

**Timothy Brennan**

Timothy Brennan’s essay (1990) *The National Longing for Form* discusses how the novel was produced and worked in conjunction with the newspaper to ‘create’ the nation. With the demise of the authority of both Crown and church a new regime of power relations emerged, the full force of which was directed towards the colonised world,

… the world became Europe’s ‘little circle’ – just as beleaguered and constrained as the ethnic and linguistic sub-communities had been under the rule of the imperial church, and the monarchies of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance (Brennan 1990: 55).
Brennan argues that the nation-state was not invented in Europe and then transported to the colonial outposts. He claims that the nation-state was in fact, “forged in acts of separation from the European centers of Madrid and London” (1990: 58). Brennan also suggests that although nationalism evolved from the imperialist countries, they were unable to articulate national aspirations until the era of colonisation. With colonial expansion came new opportunities to construct and cement the idea of the nation-state. Brennan asserts that “European nationalism itself was motivated by what Europe was doing in its farflung dominions” (1990: 59). Echoing Renan’s earlier observation Brennan notes that a nationalist doctrine replaces the social function of religion.

Brennan draws attention to the selective nature of nationalism. Since the Second World War, as interest in nationalism grew, Brennan argues that Europe conveniently developed amnesia and the terms of nationalism were reversed. Nationalism was no longer “freedom from tyranny” it was “the embodiment of tyranny” (Brennan 1990: 57). Nationalism became associated with social unrest and extreme right-wing politics due to the rise of imperial nationalism and post-colonialism. The former saw extreme group loyalties in countries such as Italy, Germany and Japan strengthened by repressive dictatorial movements and the latter sees the legacies of colonialism rarely acknowledged in European responses to Third World issues. Theorists of nationalism demonstrate various understandings of how the modern nation-state is created. Many of the principles articulated can be applied to colonised contexts but there are limitations unless full consideration is given to the historical rise of “the West” as a conceptual – and arguably geographical – formation that has come to dominate thought about so-called modern democratic nation-states. Stuart Hall provides an invaluable contribution to such thought.
Stuart Hall

Stuart Hall’s thinking about the construction of “the West” is significant for two reasons. First, Hall provides a way to understand how “the West” evolved to dominate the globe. Second, Hall gives an astute analysis of how national cultures work to preserve the nebulous concept of “the West”. Hall identifies “the West” as an historical construct which arose from the break-up of feudalism and emerged from specific economic, social, political and cultural developments. He argues that it was through the formation of discourses that western claims of superiority were bolstered, “Europe began to describe and represent the difference between itself and these ‘others’ it encountered in the course of its expansion” (1994a: 291 emphasis in the original). According to Hall, “the West” represents a complex system of meanings and encompasses any society characterised as modern, advanced, developed, industrial, urban, secular, and capitalist, regardless of its geography. “The West” is as much an idea, as it is a location. In contrast to Anderson’s “imagined community” which designates a specific geographical and cultural boundary, “the West” is a movable entity that contracts and expands according to socio-political and economic markers that designate who and what can be included. Hall notes that the idea of “the West” did not reflect an already established society; it was however, “essential to the very formation of that society” (1994a: 278). “The West” is thus a concept which functions in various ways to embody sameness or to ‘siphon off’ difference.

To elaborate, first, “the West” classifies the world into binary groups of ‘western’ or ‘non-western’ according to, as noted, perceived or real similarities and differences. “The West” is also employed as a tool to influence structures of thought and knowledge; Western thinking has a long, established historical presence in the imaginings of “the West”. Second “the West” is encoded in imagery, represented by verbal and visual language that constitute an amalgamation of what different places, people, cultures and societies ‘are’. Third, “the West”,
as an image and a discourse operates as a benchmark and facilitates ways to measure and compare different societies. Finally, “the West” functions as an ideology that provides all ‘Others’ an example of ‘Enlightened’ culture. Nations belonging to “the West” are perceived as modern, economically, socially and politically, and as such, are ideologically sanctioned as superior to those who do not belong. Said’s work on Orientalism (2003) provides an argument pertaining to the West in relation to the East which underscores Hall’s thesis. Hall’s work expands, however, by noting how national cultures emerge to bestow a strident sense of identity on citizens based on the cultures of ‘others’. Different societies were constructed as the antithesis of “the West”, and quickly became central to the discourse relating to notions of “civilization, refinement, modernity and development in the West. ‘The Other’ was the ‘dark’ side – forgotten, repressed and denied; the reverse image of enlightenment and modernity” (Hall 1994a: 314). The discourses which surround this concept of “the West” still hold considerable influence even though the world order is shifting in the new millennium. As Hall notes, discourses “go on unfolding, changing shape, as they make sense of new circumstances. They often carry many of the same unconscious premises and unexamined assumptions in their blood-stream” (1994a: 314).

Hall stresses, despite the general assumption that nationality is an inherent part of the human condition, cultural identities are not genetic. National cultures, he explains, are created not only by cultural institutions, but also by symbols and representations. Hall claims that symbols are intrinsic for national culture, which is in turn, the principle source of cultural identity, and he argues that national culture is a discourse which is used to organise and influence our actions and understandings. National cultures are a discursive formation “cross-cut by deep internal divisions and differences, and ‘unified’ only through the exercise of different forms of cultural power” (Hall 1994b: 297). Hall dismisses ideas of the nation as a unified cultural identity consisting of “only one people, one culture or ethnicity. Modern
nations are all cultural hybrids” (1994b: 297 emphasis in the original). The promotion of national identity as a unifying force, Hall asserts, is in fact, an application of cultural power.

Hall argues that a nation is more than just a political entity; rather it is discursively shaped by a range of signs from which ‘meanings’ are produced. A nation’s people are its legal citizens, who, via the medium of national culture that manifests in art, literature, music, and the day to day trappings of cultural expression, facilitate the national concept of what, for example, it means to ‘be’ Australian.\textsuperscript{41} To borrow Hall’s ideas about the construction of national culture, the narration of the Australian nation,

provide[s] a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols and rituals which stand for, or represent, the shared experiences, sorrows, and triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation (Hall 1994b: 293 emphasis in the original).

Hall asserts that shared imaginings enrich our ‘humdrum’ existence as they connect, “our everyday lives with a national destiny that preexisted us and will outlive us” (1994b: 293). This is an important point. Hall is alerting us to the need for ceremony, performance, imagery and public display – all of the paraphernalia that constitute shared imaginings of nation and that act to reassure through their repetition.

**Homi Bhabha**

Homi Bhabha’s work (1990) begins to uncover some of the symbolism inscribed in nation through literary narrating strategies. Bhabha claims that nationalist discourses work hard to sell the nation as a, “continuous narrative of national progress, the narcissism of self-generation” (1990a:1). However there is an ambivalence associated with this practice, which Bhabha asserts, ‘haunts’ the idea of the nation. Bhabha recognises that the “marginal or ‘minority’ is not the space of a celebratory, or utopian, self-marginalization” (1990a: 4). To

\textsuperscript{41} Bill Fairbanks co-founded the Green Australia Party in 1989 and helped to establish Landcare Australia, “[H]e also discovered Matthew Flinders’ little known 1804 map in England. Realising that Flinders had called the continent “Australia”, Fairbanks promoted this first naming as “Australia’s Birth Certificate” (Tanner 2015: 35).
work in this space, to provide counter-narratives, is to contest the normalising tendencies of the dominant group which claims authority over the (re)production of the national interest. Counter-narratives facilitate ways to study, “the field of meanings and symbols associated with national life” (Bhabha 1990a: 3). Counter-narratives also provide a “substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity – progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism, the deep nation, the long past” (Bhabha 1990a: 4). National symbols and narratives carry with them a potent mix of emotions; they are laced with tradition and sentiment, exclusion and myth. Therefore new and more inclusive ways which seek to re-locate and re-imagine the Australian nation often generate discomfort and anxiety for those who have a vested interest in the dominant imaginings of who and what we ‘are’.

Bhabha connects the diasporic experience of European mid-nineteenth century mass migration and colonial expansion to the project of nation building, and he asserts that “[T]he nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor … of home and belonging” (Bhabha 1990b: 291). As people migrated en masse to emerging nations, many held fast the memories and traditions of their homeland. Claire Sutherland notes the “collective memory they perpetuate may refer to a past, idealised or even imagined home” (2012: 139). Imagined migrant memories carry with them the potential to be transferred inter-generationally. Such memories are powerful and have the capacity to produce emotional, economic, cultural and political affiliations to the perceived ‘homeland’. Bhabha’s understanding of diasporic communities ‘haunting’ the concept of nation can also be transferred to the reality of colonisation that made diasporic, through enforced relocation and removal from traditional homelands, many Aboriginal communities throughout Australia.
PART TWO: Counter-Australia

Terror-Australis: A ‘Haunted-Nation’

Prior to colonisation the Australian continent was occupied by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whose population densities varied depending on the location. The land mass comprised of many nations and there were some 250 distinct Indigenous languages with over 600 dialects spoken (Peterson et al. 2005). Following white invasion, Aboriginal people were forced off their lands and subjected to a regime which ruptured their connections to country and resulted in the destruction of a way of life (Coe 2014). The effects of enforced relocations have been transmitted through the generations to produce disparate health and wellbeing outcomes for many Indigenous people. This situation is compounded by Australia’s reticence to acknowledge its violent past,

[A]s a nation, Australia suffers because it has never confronted the fact that an entire continent was taken from its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Too few Australians are able to examine our shared colonial past seriously without averting their gaze from the unpalatable facts (Pascoe & Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies [AIATSIS] 2012: 84).

Present day white Australia has inherited great wealth and privilege from a brutal history, a reality that undermines the national pride often aspired to in nation-building, as Hage argues “it should be noted that whatever traces of colonial confidence existed in Australia are built on genocidal practices, and so remain haunted by these constitutive deeds” (2003: 51). The dispossession of Aboriginal people of their lands is a form of genocide which continues to mark the nation.

In Western Australia at the beginning of the twentieth century Aboriginal people who were deemed sick were rounded up by policemen and other officials “over an area of hundreds of thousands of square miles. Regardless of tribe and custom and country and relationship, they were herded together” and sent to isolated islands in chains, “the women on Dorre’ and the men
on Bernier” (Bates 1944: 97). A century later, the ongoing practice of genocide through the removal of Aboriginal people from their land is still part of the official agenda. In Australia there is no state recognition of national genocide.42 Wadjularbinna Nulyarimma, of Doomadgee Aboriginal Community in Queensland states “[T]he genocide, the acts of genocide are continuing in every law and legislation white Australia makes for us and every time they take more of our land” (qtd. in Balint 2014: 235). Jennifer Balint argues that if the consequences of state actions, “contribute to ongoing destruction of a people” and if there is “no recognition of their impact, there can be no break with the past” (2014: 248).

Dodson contends that the current battleground for cultural assimilation is located in the vast regions of northern and central Australia, where Indigenous people “maintain their languages, own their traditional lands under Western legal title, and practice their customs” (2007: 22). He also states that the “recurring denigration of Aboriginal culture and existence highlights how short we Australians have fallen in terms of mutual respect for each other, and sustains the blot on our national soul” (2007: 22). Jon Altman and Boyd Palmer claim that Indigenous people maintain strong connections to their country and “many have special relationships with one or more particular places, often known as homelands” (2005: 148). Homelands remain fundamentally important to Aboriginal people, particularly in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and outlying parts of Queensland, these regions are frequently called ‘remote’ or ‘very remote’ areas.43 As I write homelands in Western Australia are under serious threat of closure. John Pilger argues that “traditional life” is anathema to a parasitic white industry of civil servants, contractors, lawyers and consultants that controls and often profits from Aboriginal Australia … The homelands are seen as a threat, for they express a communalism at odds with the neo-conservatism that rules Australia. It is as if the enduring existence of a people who have survived and

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42 See below and also Chapter Seven.
43 Speaking at a forum “Women Speak Out For Treaty” at the Redfern Community Centre, Aboriginal Elder, Auntie Rosalie Kunoth-Monks drew attention to the fact that “remote communities” are not remote to the people who live there. These places are home, and for those who live there, it is the cities which are “remote” (20 March 2015).
resisted more than two centuries of massacre and theft remains a spectre on white Australia: a reminder of whose land this really is (2015: 12).

Western Australia is Australia’s richest state, yet in October 2014, without consulting Aboriginal community members, then Premier Colin Barnett announced that as a result of Federal Government cuts to funding services, his government could no longer afford to provide the basic services of water, power, sanitation, rubbish collection and schools to some 274 homelands with an estimated population of 12,000 (*Koori Mail* 19 November 2014: 7). Former Prime Minister Abbott stated “[I]t’s not the job of the taxpayers to subsidise lifestyle choices” (qtd. in Pilger 2015: 12). Abbott’s statement ignores the intrinsic connection between Aboriginal people and their country, which is not a “lifestyle choice”, as the testimonies of 127 Aboriginal people from central Australia published in *Every Hill Got a Story – We Grew up in Country* (2015) demonstrate. Compiled and edited by Marg Bowman, the book cover states

> Nyinanyi ngurangka – being on country – is not a ‘lifestyle choice’ but a hard-won right, a spiritual and cultural duty, a constant battle, a source of happiness and opportunity and the meaning of life all at the same time (qtd. in *Koori Mail* 26 August 2015: 13).

Abbott’s comments imply there is a real problem with Aboriginal people living on their lands because it is at the expense of the wider community. He fails to acknowledge that “health and cultural outcomes are better for Aboriginal people who are able to continue living in their communities” (Bainbridge 2015: 5). His comments are also at odds with the findings of the *Closing the Gap Prime Minister’s Report* of 2015 which states quite clearly,

> [C]onnection to land, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family and community are all important to the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Poor social and emotional wellbeing reduces the likelihood of people going to school, getting jobs or accessing health services. It also increases the likelihood of having alcohol and other substance abuse problems (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2015: 30)

The continuing dismissal of Aboriginal people by the Australian state stands in direct contrast to Bhabha’s vision for a future in which we not only “change the narratives of our histories,
but transform our sense of what it means to live, to be, in other times and different spaces, both human and historical” (1994: 367 emphasis in the original).

Australia has no post-colonial pact with Indigenous people which Hage states “has left Australian culture with a continuous sense of unfinished business” (2003: 51). Moreton-Robinson claims that refusing to recognise Indigenous sovereignty is “unfinished business” which “continues to psychically disturb patriarchal white sovereignty” (2007: 93) and Dodson argues, “we are a nation trapped by our history and paralysed by our failure to imagine any relationship with First Peoples other than assimilation whatever its guise” (qtd. in Gilmore 2009: 11). These scholars highlight the significant effects associated with the ongoing failure of the Australian nation-state to address, recognise or engage with Indigenous sovereignty – the nation as a whole is therefore haunted, undermined, and national confidence tainted. Pascoe expresses thus the discomfort which haunts the white Australian nation,

[T]oday’s conscience is a small voice but it whines inside us like a dentist’s drill and we try to dismiss that annoyance by dulling the pain rather than correcting the cause. If it was a rotten tooth we’d tear it from our head (2007: 113).

The Australian nation has long been imagined as both egalitarian and legitimate. Yet the nation has been founded on ethnocentric histories which reflected the world view of the writer and perpetuated stereotypes through distortion. According to Pat Cavanagh, “Aboriginal people have undoubtedly been treated badly by Australian historians. They have been ignored, stereotyped, patronised and certainly underestimated by successive generations of historians” (1999: 157). The principles of historical (mis)representation can also be adapted to other areas, and in particular to the “successive generations” of Australian politicians who have routinely, and continue to undermine Indigenous rights in the political agenda of nation building,

… we are tired of being treated like political footballs. We are tired of our wins being short-term and short-lived. We are tired of politicians who wear blinkers with respect to our rights, and tired of our gains being flicked away on government whim, or when governments or policies change (Malthouse and O’Shane 2017: 24).
The actions of the present are a continuum of the past. However, with a treaty or written agreement Dodson asserts that “many of the causes of past and present discord, and division between all of us diverse peoples in the one land, might be resolved” (2007: 21). Until this happens, the modern Australian nation remains ‘haunted’, terrorised by its deeds, both past and present,

[Although their scars are less obvious, white Australians have also been injured by the illegitimate means by which this country was founded. The trauma will not begin to heal until we create ground rules for how to live together. For that reason, a treaty is inevitable (Watson 2013: 21).]

Nicole Watson’s argument is instructive. She highlights how the nation as a whole, remains damaged through the foundational lie of terra nullius. Watson argues that a treaty will begin the healing process.

“Always Was, Always Will Be Aboriginaland” (Gilbert & Williams 1996: 50-51).

The epigraph to this chapter demonstrates that the modern Australian nation provides for its citizenry in different ways. In the twenty first century the repercussions of colonisation continue to be the cause of real life problems for many Aboriginal people. Aboriginal understandings of nation prior to colonial invasion were at odds with the introduced European ideas of nation and country where a land mass constituted a nation, as opposed to a language group (McGloin 2008). McGloin elaborates on the notion of “country” as this applies to Aboriginal people,

“Country” in the indigenous context refers to a cultural and spiritual place of origin. It can refer to land or sea. “Country” incorporates cultural values and practices, stories and histories. The term “country” does not carry the meanings associated with a nation state. It is, however, a political entity in that it denotes a place that ascribes identity and stewardship, and dictates the Law and the obligations of its indigenous custodians. Country encompasses the geographical location of spiritual belief and communal kinship networks (2006: 93).
Djambawa Marawili, an Elder of the Madarrpa people states the Aboriginal communities that manage to retain notions of “home” and “country” pass on those politics of identity and stewardship and apply their own spiritual and legal doctrines: “We are of the country”, which was given by “our ancestor to our grandfather, to our father and to us. And now I have to hand it over to the future generations. For us we cannot leave this country” (Marawili qtd. in Chenery 2015: 29). This understanding of country encompasses a range of interrelated knowledges, for example: legal knowledge, cosmology, knowledge of the ocean, the land, the spiritual world and so on; it formulates a body of knowledge crucial for the survival of Indigenous people in Australia for some sixty thousand years. “Country” according to this knowledge is where one comes from, or connects to, and is supposed to be in order to fulfil a role in the social life of that place. Understood in this way, country represents a place of social, cultural and spiritual responsibility where knowledge of survival is paramount. This does not suggest that there was no form of cultural pride in belonging to a particular place or language group. Nor does it imply that the social order was without conflict. What it does indicate, though, is a lack of Bhabha’s “ambivalence” grounded in a concrete understanding of belonging, of where one ‘fits’ and where one’s duties and social responsibilities are to be carried out. Country in this context is a way of being based on, and informed by, cultural survival over millennia.

For Aboriginal people the land was experienced as “a nurturing force and a home shared with everything that grew, moved and breathed within it” (Burnum Burnum1988: 12). The continent was imbued with both similarity and difference pertaining to a landmass which accommodated hundreds of separate nations, each with differing languages and dialects, traditions, and cultures. The complexity of Aboriginal social and economic organisation, and the networks of communication, rights and obligations proffered a balance patently different to that of the invading British “with their wide commercial and industrial motivations and patchy interest in the social welfare of the citizens” (Burnum Burnum1988: 30). Out of this
schism the white Australian nation grew, buttressed by longstanding policies of exclusion which habitually focused on, and were directed against Indigenous people. Since first contact, and in the wake of the longstanding nature of colonial relations Aboriginal leaders and activists have been constant in their resistance to the imposition of colonial rule and the illegitimate seizure of their lands.

Ghillar, Michael Anderson of the Euahlayi Nation

As issues of legitimacy and sovereignty remain unresolved, Ghillar, Michael Anderson of the Euahlayi Nation, spokesperson for the Sovereign Union and co-founder of the 1972 Aboriginal Tent Embassy\(^{44}\) continues his long fight for Indigenous rights. Forty years ago, Anderson admitted he was having trouble getting the Australian government and white community to accept Aboriginal people on their own terms. Anderson blames the British, “…because the British have always, everywhere they went, used colonisation to split communities” (1975: 20-21). Anderson’s argument can be extended to the British flag. The Union Jack is Britain’s most prominent symbol and in the Australian context was both a primary tool \textit{and} weapon of British colonisation. It could be argued, then, that the symbolic purpose of this flag has indeed been to “split communities”. The maintenance of the Union Jack on the Australian national flag indicates that there is a duality attached to this honoured section. For some the Union Jack acts as a hypervisible signifier of colonisation which signals division, yet for others it is the source of national pride.

Anderson refutes the territorial integrity of the Australian State. He claims, “… neither the British nor the Australians can provide any documentary evidence of our Peoples ceding our sovereignty, or acquiescing to the invaders” (2013a: 17). In asserting the wrongs of the British tenure of Australia, the Euahlayi people have written to the Queen of England declaring their independence, as well as their pre-existing and continuing statehood. The Euahlayi have

\(^{44}\) See Chapter Six.
requested “the documents, where war was declared against the Peoples of the Euahlayi Nation or where … the Peoples of the Euahlayi voluntarily ceded their sovereignty to Great Britain” (Anderson qtd. in Bagnall 2013a: 7). As the Euahlayi Nation stretches from New South Wales into Queensland, Anderson has also demanded that both the New South Wales and Queensland governments provide written evidence which detail the transfer of title deeds from the Euahlayi to the Crown.

Anderson was impelled to take action in an attempt to make the Australian governments concede that Aboriginal lands, “were stolen as part of the invasion of the country by white colonialists” (Bagnall 2014a: 3). Geoff Bagnall argues that Anderson’s assertion of independent sovereign rights strikes at “the very core, the very foundation of the white colonial settlement of his peoples’ country” (2014a: 3). Documentary evidence has not been provided and the official response of New South Wales states “[T]he Euahlayi People are ‘oppressing’ the State of New South Wales, according to a Supreme Court judgment” (Bagnall 2014b: 3). Given the nature of British colonisation and its brutal history, “oppression” seems an extraordinary turn of phrase to use against the Euahlayi people.

Habibis and Walter explain,

[Language is an important source of cultural power and it is through its use that images of hierarchy are fixed. Language carries meanings and emotions. It forms the basis of social definition and social action, and is reflexive, acting back on the subject while fixing the object in social space (2010: 118).]
The word “oppression”, as used by the Supreme Court, is an example of the State’s re-appropriation of the terms of reference deployed to describe the lived realities of many Indigenous people. Its use brings into play relations of power which must be continually re-asserted in order to maintain hegemonic control and justify legitimacy. In this case the sanctity of State of New South Wales is positioned by the Court as ‘threatened’ by the Euahlayi whose claims for documentary evidence are determined to be “an abuse of process”. Anderson’s appraisal of the institutions of white power is forthright. He states that the courts “belong to the system” which was “set up by the establishment that stole the land and preside over their laws” (qtd. in Bagnall 2014a: 3). As a result Anderson argues “the nature of Australian society and its laws are a fraud and they operate a nation state on lands seized not by consent but by murder” (qtd. in Bagnall 2014b: 3).

Anderson clearly calls into question the legality of the Australian nation-state which he argues was founded by brutal acts of dispossession and is underpinned by a lack of documentary evidence. Anderson also draws our attention to how, at an international level, Australia has managed to secure and legitimate its status as a nation through the High Court: first, as signatory to the Treaty of Versailles and second, as signatory to the United Nations Charter (Bagnall 2013b). Anderson argues that these are tenuous claims of sovereignty and comments on the irony of a nation which purports peace throughout the world, yet fails to enforce the same principles at home. He claims that Australia’s determination to hold international despotic leaders to account for war crimes committed against their own stands in sharp contrast to its domestic policy. In 1999, both the Federal and High Courts ruled “there was no law against genocide on its own soil, nor does it have any effective remedies for crimes

45 The Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919 and outlined conditions of peace in the aftermath of the First World War. The Treaty of Versailles was the first political treaty signed by Australian officials who were directly involved in the process. This was a major step for the recognition of Australia as an independent entity under international law (MoAD 2011b).

46 Australia was a contributor and founding member of the 1945 United Nations Charter which pledges to aspire to international peace and security.
against humanity” (Anderson 2012: 9). According to these bastions of power, there was no genocide. As a method of resistance and a means to assert the truth, Anderson calls on the youth of “every individual Aboriginal nation” to “engage with their Elders to locate the massacre sites of their people and, like at Myall Creek\textsuperscript{47} … establish memorial parks at these locations in memory of the slain” (qtd. in Koori Mail 20 November 2013: 22).

Anderson also questions the Australian government for recognising the rights of immigrants and not those of Indigenous people. In an Open Letter to the former Governor-General, Quentin Bryce, he asks why it is that political parties continue to pursue agendas of assimilation which force Aboriginal people to integrate into the white hegemonic world of Australian beliefs and customs which is,

... absolutely contradictory when we consider the Jews, Catholics, Anglicans etc. who have their own private schools. Moreover, they have their own churches, mosques, synagogues and temples where they pray and observe their own religion. As Aboriginal Peoples we are not afforded the same courtesies and respect (2013b: 28).

Anderson’s argument draws attention to the ‘hierarchy of racism’ which seeks to position Indigenous people at the lowest level. Four decades earlier, renowned Aboriginal activist Charles Perkins had articulated similar concerns. Perkins highlights the status of race relations which were extant in the aftermath of the 1967 Referendum and the 1973 dismantling of the White Australia Policy. He notes that white Australians rarely socialise with Aboriginal people, however, they will mix with and welcome people from other nations. Accordingly migrants, “complicate the race situation in this country before a solution can be worked out for the existing situation” and Perkins predicts, “Aboriginals could become third-class citizens instead of second-class” (1975: 98).\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{47} The massacre at Myall Creek, near Inverell NSW occurred in 1838. A group of armed land owners and their hired hands brutally “murdered twenty-eight men, women and children, shooting them at point blank range or hacking them to death with swords” (Grasby and Hill 1988: 42).

\textsuperscript{48} The term ‘Fourth World’ is now used to describe chronic levels of disadvantage experienced by some Indigenous people who live in First World nations. Australia is a wealthy First World country, however, abject poverty and disparity in terms of health are a daily reality for many Aboriginal people as the epigraph states.
Roberta Sykes (1989) agrees that the denial of opportunities at every level of the social, political and economic domain have positioned Aboriginal people at the bottom of the ladder and she argues that new migrants identify with hegemonic ideals and practice them in order to enhance their social position, “…any situation which prevents them from being at the bottom is obviously in their best interests” (1989: 20). Sykes’ claim represents the ways in which racial hierarchies come into play to reproduce dominant racialised ideals about who can and cannot assimilate and under what conditions. The notion of racialised “ladders” that situate various cultural and racial groups on various “steps” has long been a metaphorical usage that has served the interests of white Australia. While arguments about where one ‘sits on the ladder’ persist, white interests are assured and uninterrupted, and claims that the formation of nation constitutes an act of genocide remain obfuscated.

Stan Grant asserts that Australia has “welcomed waves of migrants” yet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people “remained a reminder of what was lost, what was taken, what was destroyed to scaffold the building of this nation’s prosperity” (2015). The impact of this for Indigenous people has been enduring.

[T]he “wealth for toil” we praise in our anthem has remained out of our reach. Our position at the bottom of every socio-economic indicator tragically belies the Australian economic miracle (Grant 2015).

The current socio-political climate rests heavily upon past practice. White Australians and many migrants reap the benefits provided to them by a nation which “has been established through the deprivation, misery and suffering of Blacks” (Sykes 1989: 20). Aboriginal Nations however, are actively engaged in both the revival and reassertion of Aboriginal Sovereignty.
The Sovereign Union

Sovereign Union “is a liberation struggle” which could only begin when the evil in the Australian flag, the Union Jack, had been returned from whence it came\(^\text{49}\) (Sovereign Union 2016). The Sovereign Union is an umbrella organisation for the Aboriginal nations who have declared their independence\(^\text{50}\) and for those nations which aspire to so. Sovereign Union is resurrecting self-governing Aboriginal nations and asserting continued sovereignty over lands, natural resources and waters. The Sovereign Union was formed in 1999 and its extensive website is both informative and comprehensive.\(^\text{51}\) In contrast to the Freedom Movement, which challenges the white establishment at every opportunity, members of the Aboriginal Sovereignty Movement are not required to denounce any prior citizenship claims. Sovereign Union is a movement of assertion, of claiming authority and sovereignty, which was never ceded, over defined territory.

The Yidinji Nation and the “Crown’s Rubik’s Cube”

The Yidinji Nation calls on the “foreign entity”, Australia, to legitimise itself by entering into a treaty with the Yindindji government (Howden 2015a: 3). Jeremy Geia, a former television journalist, who now identifies by his tribal name, Murrumu Walubara Yidinji, was compelled to take action after years of “reporting the same story about Indigenous disadvantage and despair” (Brewster 2015). Murrumu argues that the ongoing disparities faced by Indigenous people are the result of the complex system of white power, which he labels, the “Crown’s Rubik’s Cube” (Brewster 2015). In other words, the echelons of white power are impenetrable, un navigable and virtually impossible to negotiate. Murrumu has renounced his Australian citizenship, his Australian passport and bank accounts and avoids Australian citizenship.

\(^\text{49}\) See Chapter Seven.
\(^\text{50}\) At the time of writing First Nations Sovereignty has been declared by the Murrawarri Republic, the Euahlayi Peoples Republic, the Republic of Mbarbaram, Wiradjuri Central West Republic and the Djurin Republic of the Nyoongar (Sovereign Union 2016).
\(^\text{51}\) http://nationalunitygovernment.org/
currency. The Yidinji people have their own driver licencing system, passports, birth certificates and numberplates.

Like the Euahlayi, the Yidinji people are demanding tangible evidence which proves the Australian and Queensland governments have rights over their land. Their requests to see the documents which detail how their land was originally acquired by white Australia have been met with silence, “[I]t’s not much of a question to ask. Just give us a look at the paperwork” however, the powers that be, “refuse to write back to us” (Gaan-Yarra qtd. in Bagnall 2014c: 2). In the process of asserting their Sovereign Rights, the Yidinji have relinquished all legal ties with the Commonwealth of Australia and intend to make history by entering into the first Indigenous treaty with Australia. A treaty would “overcome the legal conundrum of operating on Yidindji territory without consent” (Howden 2015a: 3). For example, the Yidinji State claims that the Cairns Courthouse is on Yidinji land and it incarcerates people over which it has no jurisdiction (Bagnall 2014c). Furthermore, the Yidinji associate the Commonwealth and State coats-of-arms as symbols of ownership. They call for their tribal symbol to be flown over the Cairns Courthouse in acknowledgement of their sovereignty, “[W]e made the demand if they want to stay here, they should fly our symbol of authority” (Gaan-Yarra qtd. in Bagnall 2014c: 2).

At this interface the tensions of intercultural relations are palpable, and yet the Yidinji maintain if the Australian government would sit down and talk about entering a memorandum of understanding with the Yidinji government, “[T]his could be a blueprint for true reconciliation” (Murrumu qtd. in Howden 2015a: 3). Reconciliation in this context is not used according to the white precepts of reconciliation; rather, the term is deployed subversively and infers that for the Yidinji, “true reconciliation” is achievable on their terms through social

52 Yidinji territory stretches south of Port Douglas, through to Cairns and inland across the Atherton Tablelands and 80 kilometres out to sea.
justice (see Hollinsworth 2006: 252-253) and by recognising Yidinji claims of sovereignty. Murrumu’s call is endorsed by constitutional law expert and chair of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples, Professor Megan Davis, who argues that there is “nothing stopping the Commonwealth from today entering into a treaty with the Yidindji government” (qtd. in Howden 2015a: 3).

**Murrawarri Republic**

Years of political procrastination and ineptitude brokered the Murrawarri Peoples push for independence, and on 30 March 2013, the Murrawarri Peoples Council was formed.53 The Murrawarri Peoples wrote to the Queen to inform her “that the clan groups of the Murrawarri Republic had declared their continued independent statehood” (*Koori Mail* 22 May 2013: 28). The council asked the Queen to produce documentary evidence to show how “sovereignty, dominion and ultimate title was obtained over the Murrawarri nation and its resources” (*Koori Mail* 22 May 2013: 28). There was no response. The silence has been interpreted by Murrawarri Republic leader, Fred Hooper, as an affirmation that the Murrawarri Nation continues to be a “free and independent state” (qtd. in *Koori Mail* 22 May 2013: 28).54 The Euahlayi, Yidinji and Murrawarri Nations have all adopted their own national flags as emblems of their sovereignty.

The above examples of Aboriginal Sovereign Nations provide a different way of understanding the Australian nation whose geographical landmass once comprised of hundreds of nations but is now recognised as a singular nation state. As a result, very real questions pertaining to ownership and legitimacy emerge. Given the involvement of the state in the life of its citizenry (see Hobsbawm 1995), it seems implausible that requests demanding tangible

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53 The Murrawarri Republic covers an area of 81,000 square kilometres in an area which extends from Northern New South Wales into Queensland.

54 Most recently 23 Aboriginal Nations from north, north-west, upper western and western New South Wales and southern Queensland have signed a multilateral treaty. The treaty, signed at the Aboriginal Embassy, asserts the nations’ sovereign status. Fred Hooper, chair of the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) affirms that “the treaty states First Nations people never ceded their sovereignty or titles to the Crown of the United Kingdom” (qtd. in Flynn 2017: 14).
evidence of how and when Aboriginal land was transferred into a white possession are unable to be produced. The years of illegal acquisition of land in Australia were paralleled with the colonial project of ‘civilising’ and fundamental to this process was a system of meticulous record keeping. Indigenous leaders who are calling for documentary evidence relating to the transfer or acquisition of their lands by the British have been whitewashed by elicited responses which range from silence to accusations of “oppression” and “abuse of process”.

Conclusion

This chapter brings together a range of approaches that deal with the concept of nation, a concept that holds the flag as its most prominent symbol of identification. Although there are disparate views and approaches presented here, there are indeed many similarities which position the nation-state as a modern, Western entity that has long enjoyed a place of privilege in the hearts and minds of its citizens. As a final counterpoint to many of the theorists’ standpoints on what constitutes nation, I have included a discussion about Indigenous concepts of nation and country. Having drawn out some of the ways in which the nation is produced and reproduced, the next chapter will examine how the Australian nation is discursively sustained and maintained.

55 Since the time of writing this chapter, the political landscape has rapidly changed. Understandings of ‘democracy’ are being re-assessed. War and poverty have resulted in millions of people seeking refuge in western nations around the world. As a consequence mass migration has uneased the western world which perceives its values, traditions and ways of life as being under threat. This is turn has led to the rise of far right wing conservatism and a new style of xenophobic nationalism. Underpinning this is an increasing disenchantment for national politics and the systems of governance which frequently appear to work for the vested interests at the expense of the voting majority.
CHAPTER FOUR: Maintaining an Australian State … of Mind

And just because so much of what subjectively makes up the modern ‘nation’ consists of such constructs and is associated with appropriate and, in general, fairly recent symbols or suitably tailored discourse (such as ‘national history’), the national phenomenon cannot be adequately investigated without careful attention to the ‘invention of tradition’.

(Hobsbawm 2005a:14).

Introduction

It is the case that many of the key scholars who have theorised the nation have neglected to consider the ways in which nationalism – the maintenance and promotion of the nation – is daily sustained (Palmer 1998; Billig 2013). Chapter Four will focus on this issue with an exploration into some of the more specific ways that the Australian nation has been constructed and is maintained. An examination into the seemingly banal signifiers of nation; place names for example, disclose much about the racialised and gendered nature of Australian nationalism. My analysis also foregrounds the production of what, I argue, is a discursive and for the most part, uncritical acceptance of Australian nationalist sentiment. I also include a discussion about Australian literature in order to emphasise its particular role and influence over the creation of modern day Australian traditions and identity. Despite modern Australia being a ‘young’ nation the country has been immersed in a range of traditions, so I begin this chapter by re-engaging with Hobsbawm and his work in this field.

Nationalism and Traditions

The emergence of tradition was generated as a response to a rapidly changing world. The revolutions which swept throughout Europe created significant social upheaval and as a result, old methods of ruling and securing loyalty required new approaches which saw the state play an increasing role in shaping the lives of its citizens. Traditions, both official and unofficial, enhanced and promoted social cohesion, structure and identity. New ceremonies and public holidays, national monuments, heroes, symbols and clubs became part of the social engineering process that was required to sustain the modern nation. Hobsbawm’s work on this
topic is significant. He draws our attention to a responsive public for whom the invention of tradition signified a ‘civil’ religion as it provided a tangible alternative to the “ancient social cement, [of] church and monarchy” (Hobsbawm 2005b: 269).

By the end of the nineteenth century the majority of European states and American republics had developed their national paraphernalia,

[T]hey had capitals, flags, national anthems, military uniforms and similar paraphernalia, based largely on the model of the British, whose national anthem (datable c. 1740) is probably the first, and of the French, whose tricolour flag was very generally imitated (Hobsbawm 2005b: 266-267).

These national insignia provided a tangible way to reinforce the concept of nation. Offering a range of constants in a world of rapid change, tradition structured its people and grounded society accordingly. Hobsbawm observes that invented tradition,

is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with … a suitable historic past (2005a: 1).

To secure legitimacy, the modern nation relies upon the uncritical acceptance of its importance and superiority. This acceptance is augmented by the maintenance of traditions which imply antiquity and invariance. Colonial Australians were unable to employ a claim to antiquity as was asserted by much of Europe and so they deployed a different strategy or “set of practices” that would give primacy to the ‘new’ nation. Settler narratives and mythologies based on pioneering, stoicism and conquest were invoked,

… great things have happened. The huge unknown continent of the South has been conquered by the explorer and the pioneer. War has been waged, not with men but with nature: and no war ever waged has made more demand on human courage, endurance, self-reliance, sagacity (Wood 1913: xiv-xv).

56 Note for example how the ANFA draws attention to the ‘age’ of the Australian flag.
The British race was portrayed as triumphant in both the taming of nature and the establishment of the Australian nation. George Wood notes, “It is as if a deliberate experiment was being tried to test the quality of the British race in the most unfavourable circumstances that could be invented” (1913: xiv). Wood refers to the fact that initially colonial Australia was populated by British criminals and soldiers who struggled with an unfamiliar environment. Out of great adversity Wood asserts that subsequent generations worked hard towards developing the “gradual evolution of a little British society learning at the ends of the earth to live the British life in the midst of unprecedented difficulties” (1913: xiv). This was, according to Wood, “one of the great exploits of the British Race” (1913: xvi). Wood demonstrates how ideas about the triumph of the British race were mobilised to discursively shape the Australian nation in regard to racial superiority, which facilitated “legitimate ownership and formation of the nation with whiteness and nationality woven tightly together” (Moreton-Robinson 2000: 349).

Colonial Australia could neither make claims of antiquity, nor could it profess a revolution, the importance of which is illustrated by John Roberts who notes that all “revolutions try to find new principles for legitimising authority” (1985: 281). Wood reflects that for Australia this was a difficult task, “[W]e miss the great battles for great causes; the heroisms and the martyrdoms; the inspiration of the lives of famous men” (1913: xiii-xiv). For colonial Australians there had been no great war from which to glorify death, sacrifice, duty and heroism, there were no “wars of defence, for the continent was protected by the fleet of Nelson; no racial conflict, for the people were as entirely British as the people of the British Isles” (Wood 1913: xiii). Wood’s testimonial provides evidence of the emergence of the enduring mythology of the ‘peaceful settlement’ on which the nation has been discursively constructed.

The lack of conflict is conceptualised by Noel McLachlan who argues that nationalism and “blood sacrifice” are inextricably linked and this argument goes some way to explain
Australia’s longstanding attachment to Anzac Day, “… the blood sacrifice seems to have been the vital thing. In December 1915 one officer talked proudly of Australia having leapt into ‘Nationhood, Brotherhood and Sacrifice in one bound’ as if they were equally important” (McLachlan 1989: 198). This is a direct reference to the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, the Anzacs, who landed at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. The First World War (1914-1918) provided the fledgling Australian nation with the opportunity to enter the battlefield of the world-stage. Under the command of an English officer, General Birdwood, the Anzacs joined the Allied forces (British, French and Italian troops) in a campaign to seize the Gallipoli Peninsular from Turkish forces. This was an ill-fated exercise. The Anzacs were landed in the dark and at the wrong place. They came ashore just after dawn, at what is now known as Anzac Cove, and were under immediate attack. After eight months of battle and heavy losses the Anzacs, in defeat, were evacuated. The tenacity shown by these soldiers, however, helped forge the Anzac legend,

[T]he spirit of Anzac was created on that beachhead and has become indelibly engraved on the nation’s heart. The Anzac is epitomised in the good-humoured Aussie larrikin; the irreverent, dismissive of authority, hard working, fast shooting, reliable, trustworthy, charming, guileless and ultimately expendable Australian ‘good bloke’ (Hocking 2007: 153).

Australia, as a young and modern nation needed a focus for national pride. The Anzac tradition was quickly established. 25 April has been commemorated as Anzac Day since 1916. Anzac Day and Australia Day are both celebrated as national days that are marked by a proliferation of national flags. These national occasions make a significant contribution to the durability of a national mythology that, following Brennan, “thrives on a selective and ethnocentric history” (1990: 58).

Nationalism prospers on myth, tradition and social practices which infiltrate the everyday. It is pervasive, varied, and repetitive and relies for its efficacy on propaganda,
[A]s we cheer our athletes, hail our business achievements, express our national family values, vote for our politicians, salute our flag, draw spiritual meaning from our countryside and claim eternity for ourselves, we distort history. We lie (Bosworth 2007: 12).

Seemingly ordinary social activities are commonplace. They are however, far from innocuous when understood as practices designed to maintain wide-scale compliance to the national ideal. Richard Bosworth notes that, “[P]ersuading contemporaries that the nation is as likely to be wrong as right remains a vexing task” hindered by “popular parlance, and presumably the popular mind that lies behind it, [that] accepts the nation as self-evident and all-embracing” (2007:13). Billig argues that nationalism is a theory of a world being ‘naturally’ divided into communities which is complicated by the fact that nationalism does not have to be experienced theoretically, “[W]ith the triumph of nationalism, and the establishment of nations across the globe, the theories of nationalism have been transformed into familiar common sense” (2013: 63). Therefore, the distortion of history, a constituent element of nationalism, is often not recognised, nor conceptualised as a distortion by citizens who are daily imbued with the routines of nationalism. One of the more banal (using Billig’s sense of this term) features of nationalism is the encoding of nomenclature into the colonised landscape.

**Nationalism and Names**

In the preface to the second edition of *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson notes that while the original version (1983) had considered the influence of “time” on understandings of nationalism, it had failed to note its “necessary coordinate: the changing apprehensions of space” (1991: xiv). In the second edition, Anderson makes note of the power and influence of maps on the national imagination. As visual illustrations of the geo-political space, maps “profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion” (Anderson 1991: 164). Roberts claims that maps are more than statements of fact since they translate “reality into forms we can master; they are fictions and acts of imagination communicating
more than scientific data. So they reflect changes in our pictures of reality” (1985: 194). The invention of the chronometer in 1761 facilitated the global classification of imperial possession. Territory was reconfigured. The earth, now viewed as a geometrical grid, was under surveillance, “‘filling in’ the boxes was to be accomplished by explorers, surveyors, and military forces” (Anderson 1991: 173).

Paul Carter argues that to possess a country with names is as effective “as a general deploying his troops” (1987: 119), while Jay Arthur notes that “[C]olonisation is an event in language as well as in space” (2003: 17). In Australia, myriad place names symbolise colonisation as they eradicate previous Aboriginal connections. The colonial practice of naming is thus a multi-faceted tool that constitutes an assertion of possession through the linguistic reconfiguration of the landscape. Colonial names reflect the invasive nature of white settlement and, at the same time, bolster the myth and tradition-making industries by feigning a sense of belonging to places which were previously void of any valid connection.

James Cook was meticulous in ascribing place names to Australia. During the four months spent on Australian waters, he named more than one hundred capes, isles and bays, with over one third of the names referring to the British nautical, political and aristocratic patriarchal elite (Carter 1987). In effect, Cook provides us with “a white geo-historical” travellers discourse (Carter 1987: 328) Carter conceptualises Cook’s naming system in Ptolemaic terms. Ancient Greek mathematician and astronomer, Ptolemy, theorised that the earth was fixed, and at the centre of the universe. Celestial objects therefore, orbited around the earth. In Carter’s analogy Cook, as the “earth”, is encircled by successive spheres of names (1987: 5). The furthest flung names to ‘orbit’ Cook belong to the British royal house. For example in Queensland the Northumberland Islands and Cumberland Isles celebrate the names of King George III’s younger brothers. The succeeding circle contains the names of the
politicians who were influential at the time of the Endeavour’s\textsuperscript{57} sailing: Rockingham, Grafton and Shelburne. The next sphere belongs to the Lords of the Admiralty: the men who showed a particular interest in the Endeavour find their way onto the Australian landscape via places such as Cape Sandwich, Cape Palmerston, Edgcumbe Bay and so on. Inside this ring of names come the luminaries with whom Cook was professionally affiliated, Hawke and Howe for example. Closer still are the names which refer to Cook’s own career; even the names of vessels on which he served, Three Brothers, Grenville and Eagle have been indelibly stamped onto the Australian landscape. The innermost circle belongs to the history of the voyage itself and is complimented by events, crew members (Sutherland for example, see Chapter One) and related imagery. Cook’s place names were tools for the future, “their very accuracy invited further exploration, pre-empted premature possession. They … created a cultural space in which places might eventually be found” (Carter 1987: 32). Cook’s mode of naming shows us that Australia was founded on the gendered and racial premise of patriarchal white sovereignty.

In Chapter One I noted that Cook did not lay claim to the east coast of Australia until he came to Bedanug (Possession Island). This was because when he arrived at Bedanug, Cook felt certain that no other European had visited. It was here that he planted the British flag and claimed and ‘named’ the east coast of the continent, New South Wales, for the Crown, “…in the zigzag map created by his passage, Possession Island, far from appearing peripheral, stood as a symbolic centre, a jewel crowning his outline of names” (Carter 1987: 27). Cook did not return to Australia, but in 1788, the First Fleet, under the command of Arthur Phillip, landed and established a British colony. The tradition of patriarchal naming was quickly resumed. Phillip named the first settlement “Sydney Cove”, in honour of the Secretary of State for the

\textsuperscript{57} HMS Endeavour was the name of the ship that brought Cook to Australia in 1770.
Colonies, Lord Sydney. Lord Sydney’s vision for the new colony was to provide for the “importation of 200 women from Tonga, New Caledonia, and other islands as wives for the convicts” (Holthouse 1969: 12). Sydney’s fantasy that “the union of convict men and island women would result in a new breed of human beings” (Berzins 1988: 97) is indicative of the white patriarchal sense of entitlement upon which the nation was founded. Phillip rejected Sydney’s plan, arguing that the “island women would ‘pine away in misery’” instead he “urged the [British] government to send more women” (Berzins 1988: 99).

From the outset, the colonists struggled to articulate their new environment. Arthur argues, that in Australia,

[T]he language sees double; two landscapes, one present and one ‘remembered’. The double vision results in expectation and disappointment. The words look for what is not there, for the other country that didn’t happen” (2003: 24).

Where rivers and lakes, plants and climate failed to meet colonial expectations, place names were different. Indelibly stamped in the cultural memories of all citizens, place names, whether on road signs, street signs, or on maps, construct a necessary distortion that permits the re-imagining of the landscape. In addition, Australian waters have also been linguistically colonised. Augustus Agar draws attention to the fact that Bass, a naval doctor ‘discovered’ and named a strait of water after himself, and Flinders, a young naval lieutenant, ‘gave’ his name to an island,

[T]hus for all time the name of a British sailor signposts each sea gateway to Australia, while the Cook Strait, which marks the main entrance to New Zealand, commemorates the great navigator of the Antipodes (1962: 80).

Anouk Ride finds Australia’s colonial names “absurd”,

[W]hen you are in the middle of the central Australian desert or a northern rainforest, placenames like these [Guilford, York, Avon Valley Park] recalling the countries and

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58 Australian state and territory capital cities: Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Brisbane, Hobart and Darwin have all been named after, or influenced by the British patriarchy (see Reed 1992).
towns where white settlers were from – can seem silly, an absurd attempt to mark an unfamiliar landscape with something more ordinary (2007: 2).

Moreton-Robinson is more forthright, “[T]he persistent presence of English names continues to convey a sense of Anglocentric whiteness’s divine right and entitlement to Australia” (2011a: 86).

New South Wales surveyor general, Thomas Mitchell took charge of the land by recording it on a map. By naming geographical features Mitchell “placed a symbolic British flag on each of them. The land was charted, ordered and labelled, becoming a colonial possession” (Birch 1997: 24). In 1836, north of the Murray River, Mitchell witnessed his men chase and kill a group of Aboriginal people. This moment of brutality was memorialised and mapped by Mitchell who named the massacre site “Mt. Dispersion”59 (Birch 1997: 25). Burney claims that the Australian landscape “is scarred with signposts of horror” and she questions “what this has done to the collective psyche of mainstream Australia” (2000: 74).

“Poisoned Waterholes Creek” and “Massacre Island” are in Wiradjuri country (central New South Wales), local Narrandera Elders describe them as “literary tombstones” (National Indigenous Times 10 July 2013: 5). These place names stand in testimony to the violence of colonisation. Oral tradition states that Aboriginal people were deliberately poisoned,

… they wandered sick along the water’s edge … they died all along the creek bed, and so it became known as Poisoned Waterhole Creek … Some of them got away … They drove them into this island, trapped them there, and murdered them (Kabaila 1995: 93).

‘Gin’s Leap’ is an escarpment south of Narrabri in northwest NSW. It is a popular roadside stop, yet conjecture exists about its name. White history mythologies ‘Gin’s Leap’ as having been named after a young Aboriginal couple who were forbidden to marry. White myth claims

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59 ‘Dispersal’ is a euphemism commonly used to describe the massacre of Aboriginal people, “‘[D]ispersals’ have been part of the European cultural lexicon in Australia since 1788 … ‘dispersal’ included killings on a very large scale and over a long period of time” (Owen 2016: 145).
that as they were being chased by their families, so the ‘star-crossed lovers’ leapt to their deaths.

The Aboriginal version of history states that ‘Gin’s Leap’ is a massacre site, “where 43 women and children were herded to the top and forced to jump” (Graham 2013: 12). Local Aboriginal woman Jody Sevil notes,

[T]he name is awful. It’s very derogatory.60 I’ve had people say to me, ‘Oh but it’s history’. Well I’m sorry some people feel so comfortable in history, but I think people get too relaxed with their own racism … We don’t have Redneck Hill, but we’ve got Gin’s Leap. It’s just crazy (qtd. in Graham 2013: 12).

Sevil claims that to return to the traditional Gomeroi name of ‘Coolooobindi’ would enrich the whole town and might provoke a national movement to be rid of the racist place names which litter the landscape. Moreton-Robinson points out that Indigenous resistance is “produced through the continued practice of naming the landscape, which in turn affirms Indigenous ownership” (2011a: 86).

In contrast to the names associated with atrocities committed stand the names of British royalty. When Cook seared royal names into the Australian landscape he started a tradition which continues to this day. Thirty kilometres north of Adelaide lies the suburb of Elizabeth. After the Queen’s 1954 tour of Australia, the South Australian government sought her permission to name a suburb in her honour. In 1963 the Queen returned to Australia and visited her namesake. She unveiled a fountain outside the “Elizabeth Civic Centre” and some 17,000 children came to celebrate. Half a century later, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge (Prince William, second in line to the throne, and his wife Kate) visited the suburb of Elizabeth. They unveiled a plaque and ‘renamed’ the area “Prince George Plaza” in honour of their 9 month old baby, who is third in line to the British throne, “[W]hen the royal couple appeared … the 14,000 crowd, mainly women and holidaying schoolchildren, went wild” (Murphy 2014: 3).

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60 The term “gin” is a demeaning, misogynistic and racist slur directed against Aboriginal women.
The royal couple also visited Taronga Zoo, Sydney where the bilby enclosure has been renamed “the Prince George Bilby Exhibit” (Dumas 2014: 7).

In Coraki, north-east NSW, a proposal to incorporate street signs with the local Aboriginal language was rejected after Richmond Valley Council “took the view that it was a divisive issue” (Koori Mail 7 October 2015: 16). The proposed names included Bundjalung words for six local animals, which Coraki primary school students had been taught by local Elders. Letters requesting feedback about the dual-naming project were distributed to all Coraki residents. Over 90% of the responses were negative. The council’s general manager was surprised “at the vehemence and violence of the negative response, which included threats to staff members and use of firearms” (Koori Mail 7 October 2015: 16). Bundjalung Elder, Russell Kapeen, identifies the need to educate the wider population, “[W]e weren’t going to take away the name of Queen Elizabeth Drive, just hang another sign underneath, with the Bundjalung name and telling people what the names mean” (qtd. in Koori Mail 7 October 2015: 16). Resistance to change, as demonstrated by the non-Aboriginal residents of Coraki, reveals that white Australia’s insecurities are reflected by a determination to own and endorse colonial symbols in all their formations.

**Nationalism and Monuments and Buildings**

Colonial monuments and buildings are visual signifiers of British power and authority. In England, the trend for these symbolic markers was forged during the Victorian era (Victoria was born 24 May 1819 and died 22 January 1901). From 1908 – 1947 a statue of Queen Victoria stood outside the Irish Parliament in Dublin, Ireland. Political unrest instigated the statue’s removal and it was placed into storage. Forty years later, in 1987, the unwanted statue of Queen Victoria was gifted to the city of Sydney, New South Wales, and placed on a stone pedestal outside the “Queen Victoria Building”. Ride argues that the history Australia has selected to remember is curious. Queen Victoria oversaw the British Empire which facilitated, “the
transport of thousands of convicts to Australia, millions of her own people working themselves into early graves and the suppression of Indigenous cultures from Australia to Africa” (Ride 2007: 91). The buildings and monuments which colonise the landscape have also been bolstered by the invention of public ceremonies. For example, to celebrate the late Queen Victoria’s birthday ‘Empire Day’ (24 May) was introduced to Australia in 1905. Kwan (2006) argues that this is an example of Australian society struggling to come to terms with its identity. In 1901, Federation had encouraged Australians to imagine themselves as a distinct and emerging nation. The promotion of ‘Empire Day’ contradicted this stance.

The colonial past can be re-invented with surprising ease. In 2005 a statue dedicated to the founder of Townsville, Robert Towns was installed in the city which angered some of the locals who argue that the effigy “honours the memory of a man who was heavily involved in the brutal system of indentured labour that established Queensland’s sugar, maritime and pastoral industries” (Wilson 2013: 9). Hector Holthouse notes that Towns introduced the system of indentured labour which in turn led to the widespread exploitation of South Sea Islanders,

[II]n the four and a half years that followed Towns’ introduction of the original sixty-seven kanakas61 in 1863, a total of twenty-two voyages to the South Seas brought to Queensland 2,107 natives, mainly from the islands of Mare, Efate and Tanna (1969: 38).

Wilson (2013) states that under the indentured labour system some 55,000 South Sea Islanders were bought to Australia on 62,000 contracts. 95 per cent were male. Thousands died, and many never returned to the islands of their birth, “Towns, who died in 1873, gave his name to Townsville, but visited the city only once after it was founded in 1866” (Wilson 2013: 9). Protestors, many of whom are descendants of the indentured labourers, want the statue of Towns removed as they consider him “a blackbirder and slave trader” (Wilson 2013: 9).

61 Kanakas: A Melanesian word meaning “man” (Holthouse 1969: 3).
In 2010, an iron statue four metres tall, was unveiled in the Northern Territory town centre of Mparntwe (Alice Springs). The statue of explorer John Stuart was commissioned by the Freemasons to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Scottish-freemason’s arrival in the area. The traditional owners of Mparntwe have called on the council to have it removed. In a joint statement Elders, traditional owners and concerned residents articulate several concerns, [S]o why have they put up a huge statue of a man with a gun? What message does this send to the children? This man murdered our people… The statue is also a symbol of the warfare that took place over many years as this country was stolen from us. It brings up so many bad memories of our great grandfathers and grandmothers that were killed… The statue is also a symbol of the attitude that white people can rule over Aboriginal people. We are still being dominated by men with guns – the police who harass and discriminate (*Koori Mail*, 10 September 2014: 8).

Tony Birch argues that historical distortion is “a form of radial conservatism: the history is not unknown, but is repressed by building monuments to murderers” (1997: 27). Trauma and brutality are bypassed, smothered by effigies which glorify colonial masculinity and conquest. From these examples it is evident that the statues of Australian colonisation do not hail from a bygone Victorian era. Statues of conquest are being re-born, a twenty first century colonial project which visually transmits the violence of the past into the present.\(^{62}\) The presence of colonial symbols and names as cultural representations of the Australian nation have the capacity to evoke trauma and anger. They can provide a distressing reminder of past atrocities, as Gary Foley confirms.

Foley writes of his time at Melbourne University, “I …found myself disturbed every day by having to enter buildings that were named after people who I knew I didn’t like” (2012: 24). Foley refers to the “Baldwin Spencer” and “Richard Berry” buildings. Spencer was an anthropologist who became the first special commissioner and chief ‘protector’ of Aboriginal people in 1912. Foley argues that Spencer was complicit in developing the relationship between

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\(^{62}\) Both statues discussed are recognised as controversial (Monument Australia 2017)
Australian anthropology and the state policies of genocide. Berry, Professor of Anatomy at Melbourne University from 1903 – 1929, was an influential campaigner of eugenics. He was also an avid ‘collector’ of Aboriginal skulls and body parts. Foley notes that over the years various groups of Aboriginal students and academics have called for the Richard Berry building to be re-named.63

Bronwyn Fredericks testifies that symbols of place and space are politically charged. She notes that buildings named after prominent political, religious or academic figures can become, “social texts that convey messages of belonging and welcome or exclusion and domination, and produce and reproduce power and control relations” (2015: 82). Buildings, place names and associated symbols bolster the hegemonic narratives of nation. They are the statements of ownership – tangible structures which attempt to bypass Indigenous sovereignty. Raymond Firth argues that symbols have been invented by people who “acquire them by learning, adapt them, [and] use them for their own purposes” (1975: 427). This hypothesis helps to explain how Australian colonial symbols continue to serve the dominant interests. To understand the function of symbols helps to explain the reticence for change: symbols constitute a powerful mechanism for vested interests of a particular view of nation. Firth also explains that symbols of power are most prominent in the public domain.

The Australian War Memorial (AWM) in Canberra is the national site of remembrance that pays homage to the armed forces and those who fought and died in the ‘theatre’ of war. The memorial is located on an elevated site and is in direct alignment with both old and new Parliament House. Of the latter,

when all the doors from the cabinet room through to the Great Hall and out to the main entrance are opened, the Australian War memorial can be seen, a reminder to MPs of the consequences of their decisions (Peatling 2017: 7).

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63 In December 2016 the Richard Berry building was finally renamed. It is now known as the Peter Hall building (The Melbourne Newsroom 2017).
The AWM is an iconic building; it is a shrine, a museum, an exhibition hall and place of research. According to Anderson, “[N]o more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers… they are … saturated with ghostly national imaginings” (1991: 9 emphasis in the original). Brendan Nelson, Director of the AWM claims that the War Memorial is central to our understanding of history, it is “the soul of the nation” (qtd in McQuire 2013: 8). Furthermore, Nelson asserts, “[A] people that neither knows and nor, more importantly, understands its history, in my view, is dangerous” (qtd. in McQuire 2013: 8). There are growing calls for the War Memorial to recognise the Frontier Wars, “[T]he next step in being fair and equitable is acknowledging those brave men and women who made the absolute sacrifice in defending their homes during the frontier wars” (Waters 2017: 24). Nelson claims that the Frontier Wars have no place at the AWM. The memorial, he argues, “is about Australians going overseas in peace operations and in war in our name as Australians” (qtd. in McQuire 2013: 8). The Australian War Memorial Act 1980 states its official role is to develop a memorial for Australians who have died:

1. On or as a result of active service.

2. As a result of any war or warlike operations in which Australians have been on active service. (Oakley 2014: 22).

In the lead up to the centenary of the First World War, and to enhance the nation’s understanding of the experience, $32 million was committed to upgrade the War Memorial’s First World War galleries. Paul Daley questions why memorial officials continue with an Anzac-centric focus and “stubbornly exclude the fierce battles for sovereignty between Aboriginal Australians and pastoral settlers across the frontier, which are at the dark heart of Australia’s nationhood” (2013: 18). Foley (2014a) states that the failure by Nelson and the

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64 Manifest as various forms of colonial violence and executed throughout the continent the Frontier Wars (1788-1930s) include massacres, battles and acts of resistance.
AWM to acknowledge the Frontier Wars is indicative of the broader national discomfort. As Maddison attests, “[W]hite Australia was settled on a land that did not belong to us. Deep in our hearts every Australian knows this to be true” (2011: 3). Maddison also claims that the Australian nation, both collectively and inter-generationally, has failed to respond to the wrongs of our past; dissenting voices are dismissed and calls for change are not considered as being in the ‘national interest’. Resulting tensions and unresolved issues continue to shape Indigenous – non-Indigenous relationships. Maddison argues that new ways of thinking and speaking about the past are vital for “a more just Australia and a more confident Australian national identity” (2011: 7).

As stated, Nelson claims that it is dangerous for a people not to know or understand its history, yet he refuses to include the Frontier Wars into the “soul of the nation”. This contradiction reveals how dominant ways of thinking can infiltrate, distort and continue to claim authority over the (re)production of national history, knowledge, and identity. In his discussion into the politicisation of Australia’s historical memory, Foley (2014a) notes that Nelson and the Commonwealth War Graves Commissioner, Mike Rann, are former politicians. Both play a key role in the memorialisation landscape, therefore, as Foley argues, “it is little wonder politics dominates discussion about what we should be remembering and commemorating” (2014a: 19).

The official failure to recognise the Frontier Wars at the War Memorial is replicated in Anzac Parade, Canberra’s ceremonial thoroughfare. Opened on 25 April 1965 to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Anzac landing in Gallipoli, Anzac Parade is adorned with statues. There is, however, no memorial to honour the war service of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service men and women, who defended a country that did not include them in the census until 1967,
[they] left these shores, truly their Country, to fight for an Australia that did not recognise them as citizens and on their return denied them soldier settlement blocks and all of what was offered to their non-Indigenous mates (Bagnall 2014d: 5).

The War Memorial’s Indigenous Liaison Officer, Gary Oakley, calls the neglect a “crime”. He wants an Indigenous Memorial to also be included “in the sightline between the War Memorial and Parliament House … There needs to be some national focus point, some point where all Indigenous Australians can say this is where we’re honoured” (qtd. in Bagnall 2014d: 5).

Where calls for a national memorial for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service men and women have gone unheeded, and colonial violence is deemed as conflict not war, the Australian nation reveres and remembers the ill-fated campaign of Gallipoli. At 4.28am on 25 April 2015, a life-size bronze statue of Lieutenant Duncan Chapman was due to be unveiled in Queens Park, Maryborough, in Queensland when one hundred years ago to the minute it is thought that Chapman was the first Anzac to set foot on the beach at Gallipoli. Stones and sand from Gallipoli have been incorporated into this memorial. (Monument Australia 2015).

Ethnocentric history-making perpetuates biased national imaginings as Behrendt argues, “[A] distorted history creates a distorted national image and romanticising history to promote a fictitious national image helps no one” (2003: 75).

Nationalism and the Printed Word

When nationalism and literature combined, an inseparable partnership was formed that “created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation” (Anderson 1991: 46). The rise of the modern nation was accompanied by the emergence of the novel as a popular genre. Nations were represented in particular ways according primarily to those whose works were published. Australian colonial literary output became organised around a set of white masculinist principles that both constructed and validated the nation through ideologies of colonial struggle, geographical location, and male work and leisure practices. White colonial women were represented in early
literature as adjuncts to a burgeoning white male national culture. The novel joined the newspaper as the major vehicle of the national print media and as a result, language was standardised and literacy flourished. People were now able to imagine themselves part of a special community, “[R]ead in isolation, the novel was nevertheless a mass ceremony; one could read alone with the conviction that millions of others were doing the same, at the same time” (Brennan 1990: 52). In Australia House, London, Bernd Lohse reports,

> [Y]ou feel you can see the fingers of the exiled Australians tremble as they unfold the *Sydney Morning Herald* or the *Melbourne Argus*… Like folded flags the front pages are clasped to their bosoms and the scrawny, tanned Queenslanders, the easy-going Western Australians, the correct “British” citizens of Melbourne, and the more lively cosmopolitans from Sydney are as one (1959: 2).

Since the early nineteenth century the Australian print media have employed language and images to reproduce dominant ideologies and to categorise Aboriginal people, these representations have been reinforced over time to become entrenched in the Australian psyche. Charles ‘Chicka’ Dixon argues the media encourages the stereotyping of Aboriginal peoples, “they zoom in on the negative side whenever they put up Aboriginal stories … They never show the positive side you notice?” (qtd. in Plater 1994: 124). Amy McQuire (2014) also draws attention to the historic role of the Australian media in reducing Aboriginal people to the types of stereotyping which would be unacceptable in other countries, including post-apartheid South Africa. McLachlan argues that the press is “the single most powerful engine of nationalism” (1989: 300). Billig contends that “the deixis of homeland is embedded in the very fabric of the newspapers” (2013: 94). Shyamla Eswaran (2014) states that Australian media ownership is among the most concentrated in the world. She claims that Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation is hostile to Aboriginal rights and John Fairfax Holdings, which owns eleven out of the twelve major Australian newspapers, is ambivalent.
Nationalism and the *Sydney Gazette*

Australia’s first newspaper was the *Sydney Gazette* (1803 – 1842). The paper was tailored to suit colonial interests and all articles were vetted by the government prior to publication. The *Gazette*’s readership comprised of a small elite, Anglican clergy, landholders, lawyers, and merchants; these were the early power-brokers of Australia who were quickly able to highlight difference and substantiate their claims of white male prerogative. Aboriginal people were not afforded a voice. Journalism researchers, Meenakshi Ganjoo and Karla Fritis note “the paper almost denied their existence except when they resisted forcible colonisation or became sad by-products of it” (qtd. in Plater 1994: 50). In 1806 there were just three reports mentioning ‘Aborigines’ [sic], and each focused on conflict and aggressive behaviour. Ganjoo and Fritis claim, Aboriginal people “were portrayed as “barbarians”, “savages”, “hostile natives”, “banditti” and “criminals”, a theme that continued until the paper closed down in 1842” (qtd. in Plater 1994: 50). Frankenberg (1997) asserts that the naming of ‘others’ was part of the self-justification process of colonisation. Stereotypical practices were further bolstered by race related literature and theories of science which permitted notions of white superiority to work in conjunction with the production of Australian nationalism.

The *Sydney Gazette* depicted the white settlers as civilised adventurers, while reports concerning Aboriginal hostility and resistance served to both warn and justify. On one hand white settlers needed to be warned about what the ‘Aborigines’ [sic] were capable of, and on the other, their brutal retaliation was to be justified. Ganjoo and Fritis argue, “[T]he dispossession, destruction and despair suffered by the Aborigines was either completely overlooked or trivialised” (qtd. in Plater 1994: 53). Over time as the newspaper industry and freedom of the press expanded, “[J]ournalism had a new and strident tone, often rude and vulgar, and not at all respectful of authority” (Miller qtd. in Plater 1994: 57). The *Bulletin*, published each week from 1880 – 2008 was Australia’s longest running magazine.
Nationalism and the Bulletin

The Bulletin was conceived in response to an Australia where the squatterdom, bolstered by British sentiment sought to rule New South Wales, where the under-dog had no influence in government and the shadow of convict shame hung over the community, “Australia was in the hands of a distinct plutocracy” (Hopkins 1929: 228). An atmosphere of inferiority presided as the founding editor of the Bulletin, J. F. Archibald ascertains,

[T]here was no health in the public spirit socially and politically; all was a mean subservience to a spirit of snobbery and dependency … Sydney socially limped in apish imitation after London ideas, habits, and manners. Politically and industrially it was the same. And over all brooded in law courts, press, and Parliament the desolating cruelty inherited from ‘The System.’ Sydney invited revolt from existing conditions, and the Bulletin was the organ of that revolt (qtd. in Hopkins 1929: 82).

From the outset the Bulletin combined the poet, the artist and the thinker, “[W]hat they proclaimed from the housetops in a spirit of daring and self-sacrifice became the opinions of the street and the workshop” (Hopkins 1929: 229). The Bulletin became a “mental necessity to numbers of people, and its red cover was as familiar in the professional man’s club as in the shearer’s hut” (Palmer 1968: 115). Embedded and perpetuated via the medium of print, Bulletin ideals were transmitted through the generations and throughout the land. In fact the Bulletin was known throughout the English speaking world, and, Dorothy Hopkins (1929) claims, the magazine reflected the Australian national spirit and Australian characteristics like no other. The Bulletin was a paper written by its readers, the wheat-grower, the ornithologist, the bullock-driver; from all over the continent Archibald encouraged men to express themselves.

Out of the Bulletin a style of literature grew which is credited as being the first imaginative response to life in Australia. Archibald discovered Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson. Patterson’s “‘Man from Snowy River’ became a national figure, as definite as if his features had been struck out from the marble with a chisel” (Palmer 1968: 119). Enid Heddle

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65 Pastoral magnates.
explains, “[T]he Australian character was fixed in print for us by the stories of Henry Lawson … and the poetry of … Banjo Patterson” (1949: 18-19). The *Bulletin* was pivotal in transmitting an Australian identity that linked it to the ‘outback’ and to the ‘bush’. A feature of the paper was its “Aboriginalities” page. This was the metaphoric ‘campfire’ around which readers gathered to swap stories and experiences. The tenor of the paper was “tough and masculine, leaning to the macabre in humour, the sardonic in general treatment of a theme” (Palmer 1968: 117-118). The *Bulletin* campaigned against the monopolies of wealth, power and privilege as it engaged in extreme chauvinism and racism. Marguerite Mahood states that the positioning of others as ‘cheap European paupers’, ‘chows’, and ‘Oriental niggers,’

was the dark underside of the *Bulletin* as it was of the Australian character and the period. It echoed the careless talk of the contemporary man in the street whose experiences were invited as contributions, to be transformed by editorial skill into vivid paragraphs (1973: 179).

As a method to capture and reproduce public opinion this invitation, “to capture the careless talk of the contemporary man” allowed negative stereotyping based on race and gender to flourish. The *Bulletin* set about, “creating the image of what it believed was the essence of Australianness and denigrated everything and everyone that did not sit within its nationalistic image” (Sager 2014: 13).

As noted, white Australians could not lay claim to antiquity, tradition or revolution. They were part of “a society that lacked history, other than the original purpose of harbouring a lawless rabble of humanity expelled from their homeland” (Sager 2014: 13). For generations of Australians, born from convict stock, survival became a primary and unifying signifier of identity, “[T]he rugged, resourceful men who had tamed the wild interior were offered as examples that described what it was to be Australian” (Sager 2014: 13). Triumph over adversity was an agenda which the governments fostered; they needed the land to be tamed, cultivated
and populated. It was through the romanticisation of the ‘outback’ that new settlers were tempted to buy land, and thus much needed funds flowed into the treasury.

The writers of the *Bulletin* shaped the nation with their ideas and opinions, yet it was the artists who, “set the whole continent laughing” (Palmer 1968: 116). Livingston Hopkins, or Hop as he was known, came from America and joined the *Bulletin* in 1883. Hop became the most famous and popular comic artist. He produced over 19,000 works in a career spanning thirty years. Mahood (1973) states that political cartoons provide information which relate to the thinking of the day and they offer historical evidence that documents human reactions to daily events. Dorothy Hopkins, Hop’s daughter, asserts “[G]ood cartoons may be regarded as the milestones on the road of national events. Historically they are instructive …” (1929: 103). Hopkins also claims that Hop helped to ‘create’ history and “will be remembered by thinkers and scholars as much as by the cockies and the shearing-shed hands” (1929: 239).

The early years of the *Bulletin* were turbulent, “[W]ith the birth of a national spirit all sorts of problems asserted themselves” (Hopkins 1929: 104). Hage claims that Australia was “peculiarly … timid for a nation about to ‘gain’ its independence” (2003: 52). The reasons for this are varied. New South Wales developed an aversion to its convict past and a growing resentment developed towards the Imperial Government. The super-aristocratic airs assumed by some of the early governors were galling and contempt for all things Australian by the Briton ‘at home’ was a further humiliation. Location was also a factor. The new Australian nation was a British colony set in the Asia-Pacific. Not only was it was geographically distant from Britain but it also envisaged a very real threat of an ‘Asian invasion’. These insecurities, Hage argues, are reflected in the White Australia Policy which sought to protect and privilege white identity. Following Hobsbawm, the modern Australian nation is an example of a nation that relied “for its self-definition … on its enemies, external and internal” (2005b: 279 emphasis)
in the original). Hopkins claims that during these times, Hop’s cartoons were brilliant even though he sought not to differentiate between the admission of Chinese and Kanakas as indentured labour. Out of this turmoil grew a definite White Australia policy, and no editor would now dare to suggest the opening of any part of this island continent to dark races even under the most restrictive conditions (1929: 104).

White Australian nationalism “encoded many meanings, and worked as a unifying ideology for otherwise disparate and conflicting interests” (Moran 2005: 171). The Bulletin worked in a similar way. It united a diverse masculine population, all the while promoting its patriarchal ideology via its masthead, which from 1908 to 1961 shouted: “Australia for the White Man”.

The White Australia Policy, introduced in 1901, was accompanied by the first public display of the new ‘national’ flag. These two introductions to nationalist discourse would shape the way Australia projected itself as a nation throughout the twentieth century. Despite the Bulletin’s masculinist orientation and its overt support of nationalism, its nationalist leanings were of a particular type more oriented towards a republic. The Bulletin saw the new flag as an ill-equipped symbol, an emblem of infantilism that failed to show autonomy,

the future emblem of the Commonwealth is vulgar and ill-fitting, – a staled re´chauffe´ of the British flag, with no artistic virtue, no national significance … Australia is still Britain’s little boy. What more natural than that he should accept his father’s cut-down garments, – lacking the power to protest, and only dimly realising his will. That bastard flag is a true symbol of the bastard state of Australian opinion, still in large part biassed by British tradition, British customs … (Bulletin 28 September 1901 qtd. in Crowley 1973: 19).

The new flag, the Bulletin, states is indicative of a nationalism which clings to Britain in order to define itself. It is a nationalism of subservience, and it held little meaning to the republicans who imagined a truly independent Australian nation. This debate is a continuing source of frustration, “Australia can never define itself on its own terms while it defers to an inherited
monarchy of a nation locked in our past and dictating our future” (Sydney Morning Herald 2 January 2016: 2). The Bulletin also identifies the Australian public as being apathetic,

[Probably seven in ten of Australians or British-Australians are conscious of no offence in the monstrosity that has been foisted upon them for a symbol... they cannot see for themselves ... The flag represents the old generation, the old leaven (Bulletin 28 September 1901 qtd. in Crowley 1973: 19).

The Bulletin forecasts that new generations will bring with them a “new spirit” to politics, art and literature and, “[W]ith the New Leaders will come a New Flag” (qtd. in Crowley 1973: 19). The “New flag” remains a long-held aspiration.

Nationalism and Colonial Literature

Despite the Bulletin's vision for the following generations to be charged with a “new spirit”, Australia continued to be dominated by its ties to Britain which resulted in “a curious sense of inferiority” compounded by the fact that, “little Australian writing was thought worth publishing without the promise of sales in England” (Pike 1970: 227). Douglas Pike states the pioneer writers of Australian literature told a simple story. They detailed the various qualities of the early Governors and glorified the ‘superhuman’ explorers. They wrote about the squatters, the land and the gold rush. This was a national story which “omits more than it tells” (Pike 1970: 224; see also Heddle 1949). This was a ‘his’ story, which Pilger argues was devoid of “blacks, women and other complicating factors” (1990: 31). As Foucault observes, the writing of history, “is one way in which a society recognizes and develops a mass of documentation with which it is inextricably linked” (1997: 7). Similarly, what is omitted – the “complicating factors” – contribute in their silence to the oeuvre of ‘knowledge’ that constitutes a nation’s history.

In response to a 1931 London exhibition of Australian books, the Times Literary Supplement notes that A.W. Jose calls for Australian literature to be “to the great stream of English literature a new in-running river, not what Australians call an ana-branch, a river that
has diverged higher up and merely rejoins the parent” (qtd. in Miller 1940: 13). Morris Miller, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Tasmania responds,

we cannot dispossess ourselves of our literary heritage. We speak the English tongue and write in the English language. Again, we remain in a British Commonwealth; we may claim sovereignty, but are not an imperium. And although we aspire to a measure of independence as a nation, we do so as a unit within a larger whole under the all-pervading Crown. Literature is susceptible to political influences, and is not wholly separable from the tradition of race … we are not in the position to set up an independent household (1940:14 emphasis in the original).

Miller’s reply draws attention to the overarching reach of British influence and notes its corresponding effect on the development of Australian literature. He suggests that Australian writers who live far from the old and cloistered British world must, “strike out for themselves, to battle for positions which are usually of their own making, to knock about in all kinds of jobs, to make a living as they go” (1940: 16). In recognising the fighting spirit of Australian writers, Miller urges them not to lose sight of where they come from,

[H]owever strongly we may assert nationalism, whether in literature or politics, – and we must present a united front to the world as Australians, – yet nationalism is not inconsistent with pride of locality, be it city, country, or State, within the Commonwealth (1940: 6).

Miller makes two important points: first, he highlights the interconnectedness of politics, literature and the creation of nationalism. Second, he articulates the need for a form of nationalism which presents a “united Australia” to the world, yet harnesses regional individualities. In other words, Australian nationalism is a diverse concept which can be fostered through literary prowess and drawn from a range of sources. From the bush to the beach, from the country to the cities, the Australian nation was being forged by ‘battling’ Australian writers. Perhaps the most significant of these was Henry Lawson, and although he
died in poverty in 1922, he was (and remains) recognised as a national symbol and received a state funeral.

**Henry Lawson**

Henry Lawson was born into abject poverty on the goldfields of central west NSW in 1867. Lawson’s mother, Louisa Lawson, was, “[C]onsumed with bitterness at the degradation and harshness of the bush” she left Lawson’s father in 1883 to “eke out a life as a seamstress” (Luck 1992: 127). Louisa Lawson became an influential leader of the women’s movement and publisher of *Dawn*, Australia’s first successful women’s magazine. Lawson was shaped by his mother who encouraged a love of literature, and influenced him with her progressive and republican ideals. Lawson’s first poems, including ‘Song of the Republic’, were published in the *Bulletin* in 1887 where his struggles were highlighted: Lawson has “an imperfect education and is earning his living under some difficulties as a housepainter, a youth whose poetic genius here speaks eloquently for itself” (Barnard 2000: 93). In 1888 Lawson’s first short story, ‘My Father’s Mate’ was published in the *Bulletin*. Lawson was saluted as a “talented bush balladeer” whose work “is full of humour and compassion” (Barnard 2000: 97). The 1890s was a time of political unrest, economic recession, and strikes. In 1892, Archibald sent Lawson into the ‘bush’ where he spent 9 months ‘tramping’. The memories and experiences of this time would sustain Lawson for the rest of his career. Meanwhile, a writer who called himself ‘The Banjo’, was also capturing the public imagination.

**Banjo Paterson**

Andrew Paterson was the son of a station owner from Orange, New South Wales. He was born in 1864 and as a child encountered many characters of the bush: bullockies, drovers, bush horsemen and rouseabouts. He was also an accomplished equestrian (Semmler in Paterson 1986). When he was eleven, Paterson was sent to a Sydney private school where he excelled
in both sport and study. Paterson became a solicitor in 1886. When the *Bulletin* made its debut in 1880, it renounced “the genteel and patronising English-ism that had reigned in Australian literary circles. It stood firmly against Imperialism in an era when the British Empire was reaching its zenith” (Paterson & Baglin 1988: 22). Archibald was tenacious in his quest to publish Australian writers. From 1885, and under the pseudonym ‘The Banjo’, Paterson began to make regular contributions. In 1889, and to great acclaim, the *Bulletin* published ‘Clancy of the Overflow’. Paterson’s identity however, was not revealed until 1895 when Angus and Robinson published *The Man From Snowy River and Other Verses*. This body of work was described by the *London Literary Yearbook* as, “without parallel in colonial literary annals”, and gave Paterson a public audience greater than any other living writer, apart from Rudyard Kipling (Magoffin 1987: 20). Paterson was an overnight sensation, “[I]t was a nine-day wonder in the colony that this tall, quiet and handsome young solicitor, already well known in Sydney’s social and sporting circles, was “The Banjo”” (Semmler in Paterson 1986: 5).

**Nationalism and the Bulletin Debate**

Despite their differing circumstances and views, Lawson and Paterson were to form a partnership which pitted their literary prowess, rivalry and humour against the other. Theirs was “a happy conspiracy between the two to inveigle a few extra pounds from Mr Archibald of the *Bulletin*” (Magoffin 1987: 22). In 1892 Lawson suggested that they competed against each other. The ensuing literary ‘feud’, known as the *Bulletin Debate*, captivated the nation.67 As a result, the bards firmly established the bush, into the national psyche. For Lawson the bush was unending struggle and loneliness. For Paterson, the bush was a place to be revered, where the men were brave and physical. The *Bulletin Debate* was real-life-Australian-legend-

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66 ‘The Banjo’ was the name of a racehorse once owned by Paterson’s family.
67 For an example see Appendix C.
making literature, to which the Australian public was party, it was a battle that went on for some time, as Paterson explains,

… so we slam-banged away at each other for weeks and weeks, not until they stopped us, but until we ran out of material. I think that Lawson put his case better than I did, but I had the better case, so that honours (or dishonours) were fairly equal (qtd. in Magoffin 1987: 23-24).

Lawson labelled Paterson a ‘City Bushman’ and Paterson called Lawson ‘a poet of the tomb’. The two were in fact friends, and Paterson acted as Lawson’s solicitor in his financial negotiations with Archibald (Magoffin 1987). Paterson died in 1941. His 1894 ballad ‘Waltzing Matilda’ is known throughout Australia and many parts of the world reifying Richard Magoffin’s claim that Paterson’s legacy “will live forever because many of his lines are as fresh today as they were when they came from his pen” (1987: 25).

It was around this time that Miller was claiming that the mythologies and romance of the old-world were insufficient sources of literary inspiration for Australians and he argues, [T]he beginnings of human enterprise in this new land of the south are wrought into our poetry and prose” in a variety of ways which demonstrate, “the novelty and spontaneity of life as lived far away from the routine and set of the old world” (1940: 15-16). The Bulletin Debate supports Miller’s claim; it was both spontaneous and novel, an event which stood in sharp contrast to the constricting standards of British literature. This was the brilliance of the Bulletin, in many ways a ground-breaking and empowering journal that managed to thrive in a climate that was dictated to by Britain. That being said, Miller contends that Australia remains unable to create its own national philosophy due to the nature of its acquiescent relationship with Britain. He states his aspirations,

just as we have advanced beyond political subservience and entered upon an era of cooperative independence, our literature will consolidate itself on similar lines, and it will certainly grow in strength corresponding with our standing as a nation (1940: 15).
Thirty years later and Pike notes how Australia remains confined by British norms, “some British training is considered essential for Australian scholars and leaders, while each visiting Englishman is assumed to have more knowledge than local experts” (1970: 226). Despite the Bulletin’s role in shaping Australian nationalism, and Miller’s aspirations for Australia to have autonomy, the process of extrication has been convoluted by the trend of adhering to British interests. And, in spite of the Bulletin’s vitriol, the British flag remained central to white Australia, evidenced by the fact that until 1977 Australian citizens were being reassured by the government that they could still fly the British national flag if they chose (Kwan 2006). The British component of the Australian national flag remains both prominent and honoured. I will elaborate on this in the following chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter extends some of the ways that the Australian nation has been, and continues to be maintained and reproduced. Australian nationalism and its associated traditions have been constructed and endorsed to maintain colonial power which marks and re-imagines the landscape as a white possession. From the rhetoric of public figures to history making, from place names to monuments, the nation abounds with narratives, cultural artefacts and practices which typically present themselves as innocuous signifiers of ‘Australia’. The banal acceptance of what Australia ‘is’ has also been heightened through the embedding of everyday nationalism into official histories by political and literary agents, most notably the Bulletin. This chapter has shown that in modern Australia, ‘nation’, ‘whiteness’ and ‘nationalism’ form an intricate web of relations that continue to reproduce the nation through a vast array of signifiers, the most strident of these is the nation’s flag. Through the materiality of the national flag the signifiers of nation amalgamate and disperse with uncanny ease.
CHAPTER FIVE: High Flying Mirrors – Low Lying Heralds

Soldiers in real battles and sportspeople in fake ones utilize the flag as the symbol of their unity and purpose. When they are spiritually wrapped in the flag, engendering a modern mystery of transubstantiation, its threads become the nation.

(Bosworth 2007: 26).

Introduction

For many Australians, the flag is a spiritual appendage. Through this national signifier, highly charged emotions condense and cohere as the flag transforms to become a sacred symbol: the embodiment of nation. The focus of this chapter is to engage with various aspects of vexillology in order to develop a deeper understanding of flags and their pedagogical influence. I begin with an investigation into the history of flags. I then explore some of the myths, confusions and conflicts that surround the Australian national flag and its associated family, all of which fly in a hierarchy under the shadow of the British monarchy. I note that Australia remains ‘haunted’ by a ‘three flag crisis’, and I broaden the investigation with some international perspectives. This chapter also draws attention to some modern day applications of the Australian national flag which indicate that this symbol is invested multifariously with hegemonic understandings of Australian nationalism. Finally I investigate the need for a more thorough understanding about how flags have the capability to transmit messages of trauma, racial discrimination and oppression.

The History of Flags: An Overview

For several centuries flags have held significance as symbols of political and emotional power. Smith claims that flags enable individuals “to express one’s own views to others in a concise but dramatic form. In a word the flag is a powerful instrument for social participation and communication” (1975: 36). The people of China, who first made cloth from silk, are credited with being the first to make and utilise flags. The oldest iconographic information
relating to the shapes and purposes of flags in China is dated circa 1500 BC, however the literature indicates that the mythological Yellow Emperor, who lived over a thousand years earlier, had utilised a flag. Chinese society was ordered through a wide variety of these devices. Flags were used by the emperor, nobility, imperial armies, and regional governors. They were laterally attached to bamboo poles and adorned with numerous narrow ribbons on the outer edge to signify status: flags of the Emperor were adorned with twelve ribbons. The number of ribbons decreased according to rank (Znamierowski 1999).

In Europe, at the end of the fifth century, Greek writers mention a purple flag which was used to identify the admiral’s ship in the Athenian navy. Alfred Znamierowski (1999) notes that the National Museum in Naples houses the oldest known European illustrations of flags which depict a Persian standard dating from 330BC. The Persian standard features a piece of cloth which hangs from a crossbar and is fastened on the underside of a lance. The cloth is fastened in this way to ensure that it looks draped at all times. As a mode of identification, the standard was also used by the Romans and named vexillum (Smith 1975; Crampton 1989a; Znamierowski 1999). The word “vexillum” has its roots in the Latin vehere: to carry; thus the flag was always intended to be held aloft, raised, carried as a banner to be seen by others as a marker of identification. The vexillum, or cavalry flag, was the only cloth flag carried by the Romans. Throughout the Roman Empire vexilloids (objects which function as a flag, but differ in appearance, for example, a staff with an emblematic animal), became “portable deities” which “formed a link to the divinity of the emperor and the sacred devotions performed in his name” (Smith 1975: 37). The vexilloids of Rome were sophisticated, ornate and highly revered. In 104 BC, Consul Gaius Marius deemed that the eagle become the sole standard of the Roman legions (Smith 1975). Symbolically, as the eagle ruled the skies, so the Romans ruled the earth (Maitland 2015). Vexilloids and vexillum developed and fostered deep and tangible feelings.

68 Today it is rare to find purple on flags (Knowlton 2012).
of belonging, loyalty and duty. The presence of, and popular attachment to symbols such as the Roman vexilloids and vexillum was also found in many other parts of the world.

During the Crusades (1095-1291), mediaeval European helmets were designed to cover the whole face as a means of protection. With faces concealed it became necessary to establish a method of identification. Gordon Maitland (2015) notes that initially marks were painted on riders’ shields and crests adorned the tops of their helmets. Garments (surcoats) were later worn over the armour which displayed a symbol of identity and became known as “coats of arms”. From this a strict code of rules evolved and as a result, the use of symbols became a highly regulated practice known as “heraldry”. The word heraldry is derived from the associated duties a herald had to perform for his lord and this included being skilled in all aspects of armoury,

[H]eraldry was the name given to laws governing the display, meaning and knowledge of the signs and emblems used to decorate the shield, helmet and banner, for purpose of identification in peacetime, at a tournament, on ceremonial occasions or in battle (Puttock 1988: 2).

Heraldry was a powerful form of identification. Richard II (1377-99) ordered that the Cross of St George was to be worn both front and back on the clothing and armour of all his soldiers, “all who were found without this cross were liable to be killed by any of his men” (Maitland 2015: 26). Smith (1975) explains that with the development of heraldry, large numbers of people were coerced into allegiance. It is evident, therefore, that for many centuries symbols have been used not only as a method of identification, but also as a means of coercion.

The incorporation of symbols onto clothing is an age-old practice. In the National Library of Scotland, manuscripts dated 1293 and 1306 depict two kings of Scotland, John Balliol and Robert Bruce, holding lion standards. Standing alongside each respective king is his wife whose dress is an intricate and striking creation, beautifully embroidered with coats of
arms (Hallam 2002). This ancient form of symbolism was sacrosanct. For example, to insult a shield was to insult its owner; to hang a coat of arms upside down was an affront comparable to modern day flag burning (Hallam 2002). Heraldry was an effective form of identification and by the middle of the fourteenth century the practice had moved beyond that of shields and coats-of-arms. Manuscripts, castles, churches and tombs were littered with heraldic insignia. Heraldry had considerable impact on flags and personal flags proliferated as identifiers of kinship, origins, rank and place. Of the many symbolic applications of heraldry, it was the flag which transcended them all. Not only was the flag a means of promoting and reinforcing a social hierarchy, it was also a symbol of honour and triumph, and as Smith notes, “was recognized as the formal means of transferring title to land or to some privilege” (1975: 44).

Following the Crusades, the nobility formally transformed their coats of arms into a hierarchical system of inherited and elite privilege. During the sixteenth century, numerous flags were developed for use on land and sea and while heraldic trends were waning, the influence of heraldry on modern day flag design and usage lingers. Smith notes the principles found in the earliest heraldic arms form the core of effective flag design, “flags are generally more effective when they are simple, employ distinctive designs and colors, remain relatively fixed over time, and are unlike other flags in design” (1975: 45). These fundamental elements of flag design are at odds with the Australian flag (and its derivatives), which carries the flag of another country and whose design, as discussed in the previous chapter, generated consternation and debate from the outset.

Heraldic flags distinguished friends from enemies and spoke of allegiance and place. By contrast, national flags “signify the metaphoric kin group of the nation rather than other groups” (Eriksen 2007: 3). Smith asserts, “[F]ar and away the most significant innovation of the eighteenth century was the national flag” (1975: 52). It evolved out of political struggle and notions of democracy and egalitarianism. The acquisition of a national flag was a gradual
process which was influenced by the Dutch revolutionary *Prinsenvlag*[^69] and the mid-seventeenth civil wars in England (Smith 1975). The Dutch flag was the first modern flag to abandon heraldic devices in favour of simple stripes, a format replicated in the flags created after the revolutions in America and France. Znamierowski notes that “with the abolition of monarchy, the heraldic system of identification was also rejected. The colours and designs acquired symbolic meanings and flags began to carry ideological and political messages” (1999: 18). Gabriella Elgenius states that European national flags are “intimately linked to the formation of nations and states” and are “used to legitimise sovereignty and to illustrate distinctiveness” (2007: 26). These flags reflect their origins and are symbols of revolution, independence, state-reconstitution or warfare. The flag of England for example is a symbol of warfare, and the Union Jack, which represents the United Kingdom, is a signifier of state-reconstitution. Elgenius notes that European national flags “continue to reflect the political realities of nations and are introduced and promulgated during, or after, significant national events” (2007: 27). Ultimately she claims “national flags constitute ‘national narratives’” (2007: 28). National flags are thus notorious carriers of belief systems, political ideologies and national symbolism, and their uses and applications are widely studied in the field of vexillology.

**Vexillology**

Vexillology is the “scientific study of the history, symbolism, and usage of flags” (Smith 1975: 30). The term ‘vexillology’ is derived from the Latin word ‘vexillum’ meaning flag, and the suffix ‘-ology’, meaning the study of a particular field of knowledge. Whitney Smith coined the term ‘vexillology’ in 1957 (Guenter 2013). Don Carleton, Director of the Texas University Briscoe Center for American History, states that Smith, “can rightfully claim

[^69]: The derivation of the Prince’s Flag, or *Prinsenvlag* comes from the livery colours associated with Prince William of Orange who led the struggle for independence from Spain in the 16th century. Followers adopted his colours of orange, white and blue for their flag. Around 1630, the orange band of the tricolour was replaced with a red stripe. The Dutch tricolour, of red, white and blue has gone on to inspire many other flags (Crampton 1989a).
to have founded a field of study, and shepherded it through to maturity as a community of scholars, publications and enthusiasts” (Briscoe Center 2014: 52). The purpose of vexillology was to move away from the traditional flag taxonomies, origins and histories, and to engage with the social sciences in order to “understand more accurately and more completely the nature of human society” (Smith qtd. in Guenter 2013). *The Flag Bulletin* has been published since 1961 and in 1962 Smith and Gerhard Grahl co-founded the Flag Research Center in Massachusetts, USA, which was the first professional vexillological institute in the world. The first International Congress of Vexillology (ICV) was held in 1965. This biennial event has been staged around the world ever since. In 2015 the 26th congress (ICV26) was held in Sydney. Hosted by Flags Australia delegates from 25 different countries attended. In 2013, the Flag Research Center Collection, known as the Smith Collection “took a crew of twelve people four days to pack into two 53-foot trailers” (Briscoe Center 2014: 51). The Smith Collection was transferred to the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas where it will become available for academic research.

Vexillology is an emerging discipline with an interdisciplinary focus. Flag research seeks to integrate and expand on other research done in various fields such as history, sociology, psychology, anthropology and political science (Guenter 2013). Smith states that for “the general public the significance of a [flag] design is … in the affirmation it makes about the propriety of the dominant ethos” (1975: 42). Smith encourages scholars to go beyond the superficial understandings of flags and examine their multiplicity of meanings and uses as well as their emotional and practical significations. Vexillology as a scholarly method facilitates a way of understanding the symbolic components and applications of national flags. It seeks to draw attention to the practical engagement with flags and their use as both private and public symbols of belonging and exclusion.
Smith argues that one of the tenets of vexillology is that “symbolic truth generally takes precedence over historical reality” (1975: 42). In Australia the Anglo-centric histories and dominant discourses of nation have been underpinned by a national flag which mirrors the British-Australian story as it deflects the Indigenous-Australian narrative of sovereign dispossession. Smith adds, “[P]opular traditions of flag symbolism are not arbitrary; they are promoted and reinforced (if not actually invented) by governments, their rulers finding advantage in one interpretation over another” (1975 42). Smith draws on Rousseau’s claim that, “[T]he strongest is never strong enough to be always the master, unless he transforms strength into right, and obedience into duty” (1975: 42). He states that “right” and “duty” have been endorsed via three key sources of authority: “tradition”, “religion” and “ideology”. It is in these realms that flags have been employed and manipulated to “justify the division of society into groups whose power decreases proportionately to the number of the individuals in the group” (Smith 1975: 43).

For many people flags are seemingly unimportant forms of patriotic decoration and “[T]o display a flag is to participate in a group or a philosophy that spans time and distances” (Smith 1975: 36). However, as Smith affirms, flags “constitute factors affecting that world [the world of real events] directly as they manipulate and are manipulated by groups of people” (36). From the swastika flag of Nazi Germany, to the black flag of Daesh, from national flags to sporting emblems, flags are manipulated by groups of people to suit their interests which, following Smith, “express the unity and identity of one group as against all others” and are a way “of asserting the bonds which link people despite differences in their wealth, social standing, power or age” (1975: 37). Smith’s work on vexillology brings into view the use of flags as shields of nation, specifically as the concept of nation is theorised by many of the

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70 In the eighth century, members of the Arab world used triangular flags that were plain black or white. Over time they increased the range of colours and the flags carried religious inscriptions and geometric ornaments as there was a religious injunction against representational art (Znamierowski 1999).
writers discussed in Chapter Three. Vexillology brings the flag into view not simply as a symbol but a material artefact of national consciousness.

Vexillology is a platform from which to garner a better understanding of the social processes relating to the enculturation of national belonging, inclusion and identity. Vexillology enables us,

to push further and deeper with inquiry into usage, into not only what flags look like, but how and why they affect people the way they do. Ultimately, vexillology should tell us not only about flags but about people – about the social groups that use them or have used them in the past (Guenter 2011: 3).

In the context of the construction of the Australian nation, vexillology brings to light ways of ‘knowing’ the flag which might not have been previously considered. To exemplify, I return to the work of Carol Foley. At the launch of her 1996 book, *The Australian Flag: Colonial Relic or Contemporary Icon?* Foley claims an effective and successful national flag should demonstrate

the three “I”s: **Identity; ideals; and information.** It should give an indication of our heritage, our cultural background, our religion, and perhaps even our location in the world. In short, our flag has to represent us as a nation. To do this, it has to focus on our significant similarities as a people, rather than on our insignificant differences. For example: I am of Irish descent; others of us may be of Malaysian descent, or Greek descent, or Aboriginal descent, and so on. Whatever our descent, these are all insignificant differences when we look at our nation as a whole (1996b: 105 emphasis in the original).

Foley’s thinking harks to the discourse of assimilation, where “insignificant differences” such as culture, law / lore, traditions, languages and knowledge systems must be dispersed to maintain ideals of whiteness. Her standpoint reflects the notion that Aboriginal experiences can be seamlessly collapsed into the corpus of nation for the purpose of extolling the appearance of national unity. This is a common strategy in nation-building, as Gillian Cowlishaw
comments, “[R]acism can flourish as a hidden discourse because it is hidden behind the assertion of equality which assumes similarity” (1997: 178). Contrary to Foley’s view, I would argue that cultural and racial differences are far from “insignificant”, and in fact difference is a necessary component for establishing a national identity which stands apart from ‘others’ and thus makes the illusion of a singular, cohesive identity possible.

Foley claims,

[O]ur flag should represent us all as Australians, not only as we were at the time our current flag was designed in 1901, but now. Consequently, our flag must not only be internally representative, it must also be of contemporary relevance (1996b: 105).

This is a broad and nebulous claim that invokes a unifying ‘call to arms’ as it were that refutes scrutiny or investigation. Such claims function according to overarching statements such as that made in the previous quote: “[W]hatever our descent”. In other words, once difference is collapsed, unifying interpellation is made possible. Foley puts forward three arguments which state the case for the removal of the Union Jack:

1. The Union Jack undermines Australian national identity as it reduces the nation “to the level of a colonial cipher”.
2. The Union Jack is only representative of the Anglo-Celtic population.
3. “For Aborigines, the Union Jack is the “butcher’s apron” and represents the spilled blood of the Aboriginal people, the European invasion of Australia and their subsequent dispossession” (1996b: 106).

Despite these claims, Foley states that her main issue with the Union Jack is that it compromises her identity as an Australian, “[T]here is, unfortunately, no doubt that our present flag wrongly suggests to many people that we are British. This is undesirable” (1996b: 108). Given this is
one of few texts written about the Australian flag which makes reference to Indigenous perspectives, I take liberty to quote extensively here,

[I]t is an immutable historical fact that Australia was colonised by Great Britain. Not by Holland, not by France, not by Japan, but by Great Britain.

Our whole present way of life is based on the British ethic. But I am not here to uphold colonialism. My point is that our British beginnings put into place a legal system, a judicial system, an education system and a democratic way of life that still fundamentally represents who we are today, irrespective of our early colonial relationship with Great Britain; and, irrespective of our genealogical descent.

Our democratic way of life, which we owe to Great Britain, is the reason why refugees and immigrants come to Australia. It is the reason why the Aboriginal people are able to articulate their grievances and have some chance of redress in cases such as Mabo. In short, our democratic way of life is one of the very significant similarities that we all have in common as Australians. It is a way of life that we were, and are, willing to fight and die for. The Union Jack also stands for that. So am I changing your minds? Or, do you still want to rip it off? (Foley 1996b: 107-108).

Foley’s use of Aboriginal people to support an argument for a fair judicial system is extraordinary and her reference to Aboriginal “grievances” having “some chance of redress” under white Australian law are clearly at odds with reality. Successive governments have failed to act, or indeed engage with Aboriginal “grievances”.71 Foley’s claim also assumes that pre-

71 Dodson claims that for most Aboriginal people, Australia’s judicial system is a “feared and despised processing plant” that propels the most vulnerable and disadvantaged towards a “broken, bleak future” (qtd. in Gordon 2016: 8). Twenty-five years after Australia’s Royal Commission into black deaths in custody Indigenous children as young as 10 and 11 are being held in detention and are 24 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous children (Power 2016). Furthermore the continuing health disparities experienced by many Indigenous peoples goes beyond medical causes, Pascoe & AIATSIS (2012) state that education, employment, income and socio-economic status are all factors which affect the health and well-being of Indigenous people. In other words it is the legacies of colonisation, dispossession and the continued racist political agendas which keep health disparities alive. Sol Bellear, Chairman of the Aboriginal Medical Service, Redfern notes that in the United States and Canada dozens of treaties have been signed, First Nations communities are afforded “varying degrees of genuine self-determination, from controlling their own schooling to giving them a real capacity to generate an economic base … [I]n New Zealand, Maori have seven seats which sit over the entire nation, in which only Maori can vote” (2013: 18-19). What these nations do not have, Bellear states is “trachoma, a third world disease that has been eradicated in most nations. They don’t have the world’s highest recorded rates of rheumatic heart disease, another third world condition linked to overcrowded housing. They don’t have jailing rates of Indigenous people up to eight times greater than the jailing rates of black males in Apartheid South Africa. They don’t have world beating rates of suicide and self-harm. They don’t have life expectancy gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in the double digits. And they don’t have third world infant mortality rates” (Bellear 2013: 19).
colonial Australia was ‘undemocratic’. Texts such as this are made possible because terms like “irrespective”, “democratic way of life” and indeed the overarching signifier “Australians” are contextually deployed to provide the illusion of coherence and to refute tendencies towards scrutiny. In considering Foley’s arguments, I am drawn again to a point I made previously about the extent of trauma effected by the privileging discourse of whiteness, where things are simply stated as if fact and where the lived realities for those ‘outside’ of the mantra of sameness is simply absented from view. As Jackie Huggins notes,

[T]here is no engagement, there is no respect and I agree with Patrick [Dodson] and Noel [Pearson] that we are in deep crisis. Sometimes I don’t feel part of this society because it breaks my heart to see the conditions my people are continually left in without any leadership from the top (qtd. in Gordon and Hunter 2016: 11).

Iver Neumann claims that a flag “may mean different things to different people in different contexts, but it still carries with it the basic function it had on the battlefield, namely separating ‘us’ from ‘them’” (2007: 174). The Union Jack is a symbol of the battlefield, both physically and metaphorically. The Union Jack heralds battles and wars and has been neatly transposed onto Australia’s national insignia, representing yet another British conquest where the Frontier Wars and the continuity of colonial violence to the present day are subsumed by its prominence.

**The Union Jack**

Analysis of the Australian national flag needs to be juxtaposed with the British flag given the Union Jack is a symbol upon which the construction of the Australian nation remains heavily dependent. The Union Jack was centuries in the making and behind every stage “were primitive superstitions, the perceived need for saintly blessings, and the consequent adoption of patron saints” (Maitland 2015: 209). St George was an officer in the Roman Army. He rejected the gods, healed the sick and converted to Christianity. As a result he was tortured to death and on 23 April 290 he died a martyr. The cult of St George spread throughout Europe,
where he “has long been regarded as one of the greatest of warrior saints” (Campbell & Evans 1974: 13). During the crusades, St George was the patron saint of Aragon, Portugal, and England. Every English soldier wore the badge of St George in the fourteenth century. Their war-cry was that of “St. George!” and the flag of St George was the “flag of battle” on both land and sea (Gordon 1915: 47-50). Set upon a white background a vertical blood-red cross represents the crucifixion of St George.

St Andrew also died a martyr. Crucified upside down on a decussate cross, a saltire, he died on 30 November 70AD. Some centuries later, on the eve of a battle against the Vikings, Angus, King of the Picts had a dream in which St Andrew appeared. The following morning “a silver saltire shone in a bright blue sky” (Maitland 2015: 211). As a consequence the Picts declared St Andrew to be their patron guide. Upon victory the vanquishers adopted the diagonal white cross on a field of blue as their national banner. This became the flag of Scotland in 843 (Maitland 2015). In recognition of the union between England and Scotland, King James I called upon his heralds to join together the crosses of St George and St Andrew. The Royal proclamation of 12 April 1606 resulted in, “the birth certificate of what soon became the best-known flag in the world” (Znamierowski 1999: 107). This was known as the Union flag which both Cook and Phillip employed to assert British ownership over vast tracts of the Australian continent.⁷²

The Union flag was altered in 1801 to incorporate the cross of St Patrick thus marking the union between Great Britain and Ireland. William Gordon argues, “St. Patrick had no right to a cross, as he was neither crucified nor martyred”, the rules of “tradition and custom” were

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⁷² In 1967 “[T]he Council of the City of Sydney erected a flag mast to commemorate the first saluting of the British flag on 26th January 1788. A plate bears the following words: … This flag mast was erected to commemorate the location at which the first ceremony of saluting the flag by Captain Arthur Philipp [sic], R.N. and his company took place to mark the foundation of Australia on 26th January 1788 … The flag which flies is the former Union Flag without the Irish St Patrick cross” (Lupant 2001 emphasis in the original).
defied, for “he was not even a saint, for he was never canonised, and his sainthood, like his cross, is due to popular error” (1915: 60). Under the auspices of “popular error”, Gordon draws attention to the manipulation of both tradition and symbols (see Smith 1975; Renan 1990; Bhabha 1994; Hobsbawm 2005; White 2005; Bosworth 2007; Billig 2013). Rulers old and new have promoted, invented and tailored symbols to suit their advantage. Symbols such as flags enable the powerbrokers to effectively flaunt their dominion, garner public support and, when combined discursively with historical and “popular error”, the nation is built.

The Union Jack, a flag commensurate with mythology is transubstantiated with symbolic Christian crosses,

[T]he cross of St. George dominates the cross of St. Andrew, which in turn supplants the cross of St. Patrick. This design of the Union Jack remains a constant reminder to the ‘defeated’ nations of the superiority of the English nation (Hocking 2002: 24).

Gordon Campbell and Idrisyn Evans note the difficulties with flags of war carrying crosses, but they argue that the cross is a Christian emblem of peace and “throughout history peace-loving men have had to fight in self-defence and to protect their ideals from savage enemies who aimed at destroying them” (1974: 13). The cross was specifically employed, “it was the Christian emblem. They [the forefathers] aimed at making their flags symbolize the ideals for which they fought” (Campbell and Evans 1974: 13). The Union Jack symbolises a specific ideology and is an embalmed marker of Christianity.

Crosses on flags matter. The Australian flag is replete with both saintly and celestial formations. White Australia’s attachment to the Southern Cross was criticised by Gordon who argues the constellation, “is a very small one” and “has a curious attractiveness for people south of the equator, and is rather embarrassing in its popularity from a flag point of view” (1915: 107). Not content with this, Gordon complains, “how freely they [the stars] have to be treated to get them into the shape of a cross as they appear on the Australian flag” (108). Campbell
and Evans provide a different perspective arguing that the first explorers “rejoiced” in seeing a cross in the sky, “… the emblem of their religion, a group of stars in the form of a cross … a sign from Heaven that they could not travel beyond the Divine care” (1974: 100). The cross as the embodiment of Christianity has been employed to endemically shape both the fabric of the Australian nation and its flag.

**The Australian National Flag**

The British Union Jack was Australia’s national flag until 14 February 1954 (Kwan 2006). The transition from Australian blue ensign to current national flag took fifty three years. At the beginning of the twentieth century, as the colonies moved to federate, momentum gathered to find a new flag for the new nation. Public interest was such that the 1901 Commonwealth government flag competition received 32,823 entries from around the world, all of which were publicly displayed yet subsequently destroyed by the Department of External Affairs (Cayley 1966). The competition rules stipulated that each competitor was required to submit two coloured flag sketches, one for merchant ships and one for naval and official vessels. Maritime flags are known as ensigns, whereas flags on land are known simply as flags. The winning flag “was only intended for use at sea. The Australian national flag on land was expected to continue to be the Union Jack” (Kelly 1994: 53). It took the panel of five judges less than a week to decide on the winning design. Five almost identical entries were judged equal first. The Union Jack sat as point of honour and the Federation Star was positioned to point to the centre of the blood-red cross of St George. An examination of the judging criteria reveals that the Union Jack, Federation star and Southern Cross were prerequisites. The judges,

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73 Film director and cinematographer Warwick Thornton’s documentary, *We Don’t Need a Map* (2017) explores the astronomical, mythological, symbolic and spiritual meanings of the Southern Cross. *We Don’t Need a Map* provides Indigenous perspectives which relate to the Southern Cross and also investigates the appropriation of the Southern Cross by white Australia. This documentary includes various discussions about nationalism, discourse and symbols. The film opened the Sydney Film Festival in June 2017 and was first broadcast on National Indigenous Television [NITV] 23 July 2017.
all British naval officers, deemed “an Imperial Union Ensign of the British Empire” (Hocking 2002: 30), should comprise of:

- The Union Jack on a blue or red ground.
- A six-pointed “star,” representing the six federated States of Australia, immediately under the Union Jack and pointing direct to the centre of St George’s Cross, and of a size to occupy the major portion of one quarter of the flag.
- The “Southern Cross” in the flag as being indicative of sentiment of the Australian nation (Cayley 1966: 104).

On 3 September 1901, Prime Minister Barton announced the winning design and the blue ensign, which had been pre-made, was flown for the first time. The final decision however, rested with Britain. On 20 February 1903, Australia was advised that King Edward VII had approved the design. The red field was for civil use and the blue for government use. At this time the Federation or Commonwealth Star had six points, one for each federated state. In 1905 Australia acquired the British colony of New Guinea. An extra point was added to the Federation Star in 1908 to represent Australia’s new territory. Papua New Guinea gained independence from Australia in 1975 but the flag remained unaltered; the seven pointed star duly represents all the Commonwealth Territories.74

Flags of the States and the Northern Territory

In Australia the influence of the Union Jack is matched by the British blue ensign. Whether on land or sea, British flags shape the Australian nation, past and present. The British blue ensign forms the basis of every Australian state flag. The British blue ensign is also the template for the Australian national flag. In the context of this work, any findings pertaining to the Australian national flag must also be transposed to the state flags. Use of the British blue

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74 The Australian Capital Territory (1911), the Northern Territory (1911), Norfolk Island (1913), Jervis Bay Territory (1915), Australian Antarctic Territory (1933), Ashmore and Cartier Islands (1933), Heard and McDonald Islands (1958) and the Coral Sea Islands (1969) (Foley 1996a: 82).
ensign was increased by the *Colonial Naval Defence Act* 1865, which stated all vessels belonging to the colonies were required to use the British blue ensign with the badge of the colony displayed in the fly, “[T]his Act made possible the enormous future growth in the number of flags with the Union Jack in the canton” (Znamierowski 1999: 108). Each colonial badge was vetted by the British Admiralty before approval and during the nineteenth century, over one hundred colonial ensigns were in use. The proliferation of this ensign was a statement to the world that proclaimed the global presence of the British Empire.

The six Australian state flags are embellished with colonial iconography and all carry the Union Jack as official point of honour. The flag of Victoria is the only state flag not to carry a badge. In 1870, the Victorian state flag depicted the Southern Cross with five white stars in the fly. An imperial crown was added to this in 1877. This was changed to the Tudor crown in 1901 and then the crown of St Edward in 1953. When the Australian blue ensign was judged as the winning design in 1901, it was to the consternation of many who considered the Australian blue ensign to be an appropriation of the Victorian state flag. The state flag of New South Wales was adopted 11 July 1876. The badge which adorns this flag is blazoned with the gold lion of England surmounted on the centre of the red cross of St George. This emblem is set on a white roundel and on each arm of the cross sits a gold star representing the Southern Cross.

Originally Queensland wanted a profile of Queen Victoria’s head as its state emblem. This was considered too complicated and so a new badge was sent to London for approval. A blue Maltese cross on a white roundel, surmounted by a Royal Crown was officially adopted on 29 November 1876. The crown was altered in 1963 in accordance with Queen Elizabeth’s preferred design. The colony of Western Australia was also known as the ‘Swan River Colony’. The flag of Western Australia was adopted on 27 November 1875 and its badge featured a black swan on a yellow roundel. Originally the swan faced away from the flagpole and swam
towards the fly. This was considered sinister in heraldic expression. Reversed in 1953, the swan now faces the staff and appears to the left of the viewer. The Tasmanian state flag was adopted on 25 September 1876. Its badge features a white roundel with a red heraldic lion, one paw raised, in the centre. From 1878 – 1904 the South Australian flag carried a badge in which Britannia is engaged in conversation with an Aboriginal man. The current South Australian flag was proclaimed on 13 January 1904. Its badge displays an Australian piping shrike (a white-backed magpie) on the branch of a gum tree set against a golden rising sun.

The Northern Territory is not a recognised state. The Northern Territory flag along with the Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Australian Capital Territory, Norfolk and Christmas Island flags are described by Foley as “radical” (1996a: 189-195). According to Foley the radical “purists” reject the national flag and associated colonial colours and “adopt a totally different and radical design” (1996a:182). The Northern Territory flag was adopted on 1 July 1978, when self-government was proclaimed. It was the first flag to break away from the rigors of colonial subjugation. The Territory flag features the official colours of Northern Territory: black, white and red ochre. A black panel on the left features the Southern Cross in white stars. Opposite this is a white Sturt’s desert rose with a black seven-pointed star in the centre to symbolise the Commonwealth Star surmounted on a red-ochre panel (for comprehensive details on the above State and Territory flags see: Cayley 1966; Foley 1996a; Znamierowski 1999; Commonwealth of Australia 2000, 2010; Kelly 2007; Tayleur 2013). The Northern Territory aspires to statehood by 1 July 2018; there is supposition that this might lead to a name.

75 The brutal and oppressive nature of colonial practice in the early settlement of Australia was of concern to the Colonial Office in London (Reynolds 1987). When the Province of South Australia was created officials demanded it be a more humane process. Under the instructions of the Letters Patent 19 February 1836, London insisted that Aboriginal people had property rights which were to be respected. A Protector was appointed to “to protect the Aborigines in the undisturbed enjoyment of the lands over which they may possess proprietary rights, and of which they are not disposed to make a voluntary transfer” (Klaassen 2016). Reynolds argues that statements from London were virtually impossible to implement, “Australian society already had a history of its own. Attitudes, interests and expectations were entrenched” (1987: 102). Subsequently and contrary to official directions, land rights for the Aboriginal people of South Australia were dismissed.
change or even a modification of the Australian flag. Former Prime Minister Abbott, noted for his support of the current national flag, stated that if the Northern Territory were to become a state, and if, “the Commonwealth star [on the national flag] was to be a seven-pointer star rather than a six-pointer star, that’s hardly a massive change”, he continued, “I would say that is an evolution rather than a revolution” (qtd.in Whyte 2015: 4). As stated, the Commonwealth star on the national flag has been a “seven-pointer” since 1908. “Evolution rather than revolution” however requires consideration. Abbott’s comment frames the flag as a steady signifier of nation, which could indeed accommodate a slight change. In contrast to this lies the inference that any “radical” change to the flag is tantamount to a “revolution”.

In 1962, the Queen gave her approval for the design of a flag which incorporated the symbols of each Australian state. The Queen’s personal flag for Australia flies to “acknowledge her role of as Queen of Australia” (Commonwealth of Australia 2010: 34). Surmounting the symbols of each Australian state is a large seven-pointed gold Commonwealth star. Within the star sits the Queen’s personal device, a blue roundel charged with the letter ‘E’ set beneath a Royal Crown within a chaplet of roses. The Royal flag links the British monarchy to each of the Australian states and vice-versa; the over-arching symbolism of the state flags is that of the British monarchy. When the Queen visits Australia her personal flag takes precedence over the Australian national flag (Smout 1976)

As noted, the state flags were mostly endorsed before the 1903 Royal Seal of approval was given to the Australian blue and red ensigns. Public reaction to the ‘new’ Australian ensign(s) was unenthusiastic, the new flag “failed to stir the general public, and was not widely flown” (Maitland 2015:220). In 1904, Prime Minister John Watson argued the blue ensign, “does not adequately symbolize our national life and is not sufficiently indicative of Australian unity” (qtd. in Cayley 1966: 115). Watson’s alternative, a white flag with the Union Jack in the centre resting on six vertical red stripes, was vehemently rejected by his peers who demanded
a flag without the Union Jack, “[S]o the whole question of the flag became a sorry muddle, for which politicians of all parties were to blame. But no new design was substituted” (Cayley 1966: 115). This “sorry muddle” became an ongoing crisis. In fact confusion has surrounded the Australian flags since their inception.

**A Three Flag Crisis**

In order to demonstrate how national identity has been both procured and affected by the flags of Australia, it is important to consider the confusion wrought by them as public emblems. Post-federation, I can identify three instances of a “three flag crisis”. First, the British Union Jack was the national flag of Australia until 14 February 1954. Prior to this time, and somewhat unconventionally, both the red and blue Australian maritime ensigns were adopted for use on land. Alongside the Union Jack, the ensigns vied for and were given space and attention in the public sphere, as the photograph below demonstrates. This naturally resulted in practical, emotional confusion and conflict around flag usage. Which flag was appropriate for which occasion and what place?

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76 Some of this work comes from my paper “Flagging Australia: Claims and Identity”, to be published as part of the Proceedings of the 26th International Congress of Vexillology.
This conundrum lasted for decades. As recently as 1981 the Australian national flag was described in the First Schedule to the *Flags Act* 1953-1973 as, “the British blue ensign... differenced by a large white star... and five white stars, representing the Southern Cross” (Foley 1996a: 1).

As the Union Jack, the red and blue Australian ensigns competed for attention; views were polarised around allegiance to Britain and the desire for a distinctive national identity. Loyalties were tested and patriotic duty questioned. Russell Kennedy notes the uncertainty created by Australia’s flags, “[T]his clumsy sequence of events must be partly to blame for the stumbling development of our national identity” (1998: 17). Acknowledging the specificity of
the time gives credence to Kennedy’s argument. In Chapter Four I noted that Empire Day was established in 1905 to mark late Queen Victoria’s birthday. At this time, educational propaganda advocated that children who were “good Britishers” would become “good Australians” (Kwan 2006: 47). Within five years however, children were being fed the reverse message, they were told by that “by being ‘good Australians’ they would become ‘good Britishers’” (Kwan 2006: 47). By way of further example, Kwan notes that during the First World War there were struggles with identity as Australians entered the war with two flags to represent their ‘dual’ nationality, “[C]ould loyalty to Australia mean disloyalty to Britain?” could “an Australian flag … serve as the national flag without being a disloyal symbol” (2006: 55).

During the 1920s the Union Jack continued to preside over the Australian ensigns. By 1924 the blue ensign could be used on public buildings, however, private businesses and individuals were expected to use the red ensign. Confusion and notions of individual flag superiority were propelled into World War II. Coffins of Australian servicemen, overseas and at home, were draped with the Union Jack in deference to tradition, yet if grieving families wished to incorporate the Australian flag as well, or instead of, this was permissible but only on request (Kwan 2006). Confusion as to who Australians ‘were’ was compounded by the fact that Australians were officially subjects of the British Crown until 1948. Confusion was also buttressed by the rhetoric of the then Prime Minister Robert Menzies who declared in his 1951 commemoration of the first fifty years of federation that Australia was a “well-knit nation” claiming that, “[I]n our fifty years there has never been argument about whether we are British or not. We are British” (qtd. in Kwan 2006: 102). Menzies rhetoric was mirrored in the flags, “[S]ome thought they could fly whichever flag they pleased, merely selecting one to suit their mood or colour scheme” (Cayley 1966: 117). For many Australians the Union Jack remained their flag of choice. Menzies sought to remedy the confusion and had the Australian national
flag officially defined in the *Flags Act 1953*. In order to help Australians transition to the new official symbol, Menzies waited for a young Queen Elizabeth II to visit Australia and proclaim her assent. Royal approval was granted on 14 February 1954. Finally the Australian blue ensign took precedence over the Union Jack, but this was no panacea; on-going misunderstandings about which flag to fly did not abate. As recently as 1977 Australians were being reassured by the Government that they could still fly the Union Jack.

In *The Flag Book* Arthur Smout (1976), cites numerous frustrations. On the one hand, he endorses Cook’s use of the Union Jack as “another example of the flag being used as the symbol of national authority” (1976: 7). Conversely he asserts that the continued use of the Union Jack by Australians equates to national disloyalty. Smout argues while every Australian citizen has the right to fly the Union Jack, it must be “in conjunction with” the Australian national flag, not “instead of” (1976: 14). He questions “why the Union Jack is flown above the State Government Houses? Since Elizabeth is Queen of Australia, why is not the Australian National Flag flown by her representatives?” (1976: 16). Smout blames the Commonwealth Government and calls on it to take steps to end the anachronism which sees Australian national authority symbolically usurped by the Union Jack. To highlight the ambiguity produced by flags, Smout draws attention to a Brisbane Australia Day naturalisation ceremony. At this event the Union Jack and Australian national flag were both present on the stage, which, Smout argues, transmits a message of confusion. In his quest to be free of the dominating force of the Union Jack, he demands an end to “this ancient custom of displaying the Union Jack and Australian National Flag on the platform – a relic of the bygone days of Empire” (1976: 60).

The second “three flag crisis” is identified by Smout in a chapter titled: “Is it really necessary to have three flags?” (1976: 64). Smout notes the idiosyncratic situation in which Australia finds itself as it employs three ensigns on the water, “…why three flags? Could not one National Flag serve all purposes? The U.S.A. appears to get along very well with one
national flag, as do most other nations in the world” (Smout 1976: 64). Smout claims that the blue ensign is for use by customs and government vessels; the red specifies nationality but has no authority while the white ensign belongs specifically to the Royal Australian Navy; this is “a hang-over from the days of Empire dependency and that Australia has continued this anachronism, simply following U.K. tradition” (Smout 1976: 65).

The Australian white ensign was not adopted until 1967. Prior to this the British white ensign was used by the Australian navy. The British white ensign, similar to its blue counterpart, worked in conjunction with the Union Jack. Agar states the British white ensign is a symbol of security that represents “Britain’s influence and good name [which] stood for everything that was fair, just and honourable”, Agar continues, when “our” colonies “asked” they “received the protection of the White Ensign afloat and the Union Jack on shore, in the days when their lands would otherwise have been in a state of tribal confusion” (1962: 27). The significance of the British white ensign and its adoption by Australia further deepens this investigation. The omnipresence of British symbolism is manifest at every stratum of Australian cultural life.

The third “three flag crisis” I draw attention to through the flying of multiple flags, indicates that resultant issues of confusion and conflict which surround Australian identity have been propelled into the twenty first century. According to Eriksen multiple flag use infers that “the multivocality of a single flag cannot do justice to all the moral obligations and levels of belonging” (2007: 6). Australia fits well with Eriksen’s claim. Currently in Australia, the national flag and the Aboriginal flag and Torres Strait Islander flag are frequently flown in unison, a multi-fold gesture of inclusion that sits in opposition to the on-going realities previously cited.
Figure 4: The Australian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags flying in Brisbane (Image: ABC 2010).

The Australian flag, with its colonial iconography, colours, heritage and off-spring, serves as an ongoing reminder of the theft of Indigenous peoples’ sovereign ownership of the land and the violence, that continues to have real social and cultural effects on health and well-being.

Some International Opinions

Foley states it is “undeniably incongruous” that in 1981 the Australian national flag could still be officially described in terms of the British flag (1996a: 1). This form of reference lingers with somewhat extraordinary perceptions in popular culture. For example, American actor, Jerry Seinfeld said, “I love the Australian Flag; Britain at night” (qtd. in Scruby 2009: 46). In response, Harold Scruby, executive director of Ausflag (see below), argues that is “how the

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77 When flags fly in unison strict rules of precedence apply and the national flag must reside in the position of honour. For example, with a line of flagpoles the Australian flag must be flown at the far left of the person who faces them. If the flagpoles vary in height then protocol dictates that the Australian flag must fly from tallest flagpole.

78 Further examples include the Royal Australian Air Force ensign. Adopted in 1948, the Union Jack sits in the canton on a light blue field, a red kangaroo was added in 1982. The New South Wales Ambulance Service flag also has the Union Jack in the canton, the service badge is in the fly and it was adopted in 1984. See also the flags of each State Governor.
rest of the world sees us. Not as a proud, mature, fiercely independent, sovereign nation, but as a colony, still desperately clutching child-like at the bosom of a bygone empire” (2009: 46). The Australian flag, according to Scruby, represents genocide, invasion and oppression to Indigenous people and its symbols of exclusion fly in the face of ‘Reconciliation’ (2001). Reflecting Billig’s thesis of “banal nationalism”, Scruby claims the Australian flag, “subliminally proclaims that if you’re of British descent, you’re superior to all other citizens of this country” (2001).

Returning to popular culture, for some British sports fans the Australian flag is a source of ridicule. The “English Barmy Army” was founded by three friends during cricket’s England 1994 / 95 Ashes tour of Australia. The “Barmy Army” now has a membership of over 3,000 and has produced a specialised songbook of taunts, tailor-made for the Australian ‘enemy’, a sample of which I cite here:

The Aussies love the English

The Aussies love the English, you might find it quite strange
’Cos we sent them all down under, with only balls and chains
And when they see the English, they always shout and scream
But when they had the chance to vote they voted for the Queen!

God save your gracious Queen
Long live your noble Queen
God save your Queen (you're a convict)
Send her victorious
Happy and glorious
Long to reign over you
God save your Queen
(England’s Barmy Army n.d.).
Adam Collins notes that over the years this ‘song’ has been accompanied with a chant, a deliberate and patronising statement of British superiority that demands Australia to “[G]et your shit stars off our flag” (2014: 32). Collins, a member of the Australian Republican Movement, calls for the public to support the nation in the same way that they do the cricket, he argues that a republic will leave, “no confusion about where we stand as a nation” (2014: 32). Collins finds the ridicule galling: the Barmy Army, he says “are laughing at us, and well may they snigger. The person who holds the highest office for our proud and vast land lives in a palace several thousand kilometres away” (2014: 32).

In 1988 and 2015, Professor of American Studies and vexillologist Scot Guenter,79 conducted two quantitative studies. The purpose of these studies was to extend understandings of flags by going beyond the taxonomies of history, design and usage. Guenter’s methodology focused on Sperber’s theoretical process of interpretation which employs two concepts, “focalisation” and “evocation”. This approach enabled Guenter to examine “recognition” of a flag, through focalisation that explores “meanings” of a flag through evocation. In both studies 200 American college students were presented with a sample of ten national flags, including the Australian flag. Question #1 asked the student to identify the flag. Question #2 invited the respondent to think and to try and summarise how and where they had learnt the information used to answer question #1. From this stage of focalisation, the survey moves to evocation. Question #3 asked the student to think about their response to question #1 and to, “list the ‘connection’ your mind makes from that flag to what images, thoughts, or concerns follow as you free associate. List the images and thoughts that come to mind” (Guenter 2015: 10). Guenter’s research spans 27 years and extends my thesis by providing an approach from which international interpretations of the Australian flag can be garnered. Guenter’s most recent findings indicate that Britain “remains a very powerful and dominant element within the

79 Guenter’s paper will be published as part of the Sydney ICV26 Proceedings 2015. See also (Guenter 1988).
integrated meaning conveyed by the national flag of Australia to American college students” (2015:13). A comparative analysis between the 1988 and 2015 studies reveals that the 2015 data produced a “harsher interpretation” of British imperialism (2015: 13). Guenter’s findings also indicate that 21st century American responses to the Australian flag are entwined with “some possible uneasiness with race” (2015: 14).

Flag Organisations of Australia

Smout (1976) brings to light many of the problems and ambiguities which surrounded the flags of Australia and were in play during the 1970s. In the early 1980s the official status of the Australian flag was that of a defaced British blue ensign. At this time, and in the lead up to the 1988 bicentenary of British occupation, there were increasing calls for a new Australian flag. Against this backdrop, three flag groups formed. In 1981, Ausflag was established. Scruby, co-founder and executive director states, Ausflag’s purpose is to source and advocate for a “flag which clearly and unequivocally proclaims our identity to other nations … and a flag which unites the Australian nation in all its diversity” (qtd. in Kwan 2006: 121). Ausflag calls for a distinct Australian national flag, however notions of ‘unity’ are somewhat problematic. Reflective of Anderson’s “imagined community” ‘unity’ is a utopian fantasy; notions of ‘inclusion’ for a national symbol, however, are more tangible, as White attests,

the function of a national symbol lies not in its capacity to convey particular shared meanings, but in its power to spark recognition in a population in which shared understanding of what the nation stands for is impossible. Its role is thus to identify and map, to imagine the community without imagining it united (2005:130).

Ausflag “describes itself as a voluntary, non-political, non-republican, non-anti-monarchist organisation that is not anti-British, but rather pro-Australian” (Foley 1996a: 91). Ausflag has

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80 In vexillology ‘deface’ is a technical term used when a device, such as a badge or a constellation has been added to an existing flag.
launched several flag design competitions and maintains its presence in the debate for a new Australian flag. In contrast sits the Australian National Flag Association.

In 1983 and in response to Ausflag and an increasing political push by Labor to change both the national flag and the national anthem, former President of the Returned and Services League\(^8\) (RSL), Sir Colin Hines, formed a steering committee and invited John Vaughn to join the association (Kwan 2006). The primary focus of the ANFA is to protect and promote the national flag, the Australian blue ensign, in its current form. As Ausflag sought to dispense with the Union Jack, the ANFA fought to retain it. According to Vaughn the symbols of the national flag represent, “‘a unique Australian history and national identity’. Once Australians understood those symbols, Vaughn argued, they would not want to change their flag. It was a matter of education” (Kwan 1994b: 304). The discursive framing which privileges the national flag is powerful and harks back to the era of the White Australia Policy where white supremacy, entitlement and privilege are understood as being the inherent and unquestionable facets of Australian identity. Or to put this another way, “[T]he invisibility of privilege strengthens the power it creates and maintains. The invisible cannot be combated, and as a result privilege is allowed to perpetuate, regenerate, and re-create itself” (Wildman and Davis 2002: 89).

The current Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, was a Director of Ausflag for six years. However, in 2004, Turnbull accepted an invitation to join the ANFA. Turnbull announced “it is a long time since I canvassed the desirability of changing our flag and despite allegations to the contrary I am a convinced supporter of our national flag” (qtd. in Steketee 2004). Vaughn’s

\(^8\) The Returned & Services League of Australia was formed in 1916 as the ‘Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia’. It was adapted in 1940 to incorporate the air force and became known the ‘Returned Services League of Australia’ in 1965. In 1990 it changed to its current name to include existing as well as former members of the Australian Defence Forces. The patron of the RSL is Queen Elizabeth II. The badge of the RSL bears the British Crown which signifies its allegiance to Queen and country.
triumph was palpable. The “long term director and contributor of Ausflag”, Malcolm Turnbull, had defected,

Dear Mr Scruby … [Turnbull’s] support for the traditional Australian National Flag of “Stars and Crosses” is most significant. Mr Turnbull is, I believe, well attuned to the views of the Australian community. The Australian flag, now 103 years old, is our permanent, chief national symbol by law, custom and tradition … I call upon you to acknowledge reality and immediately close-down the Ausflag website and end all other activities of Ausflag Limited. You may care to consider donating any surplus funds to the worthy, non-profit school educational undertakings of the Australian National Flag Association … Like Mr Turnbull, you may wish to become a member of ANFA … Yours sincerely John Vaughn.

Scruby responded:

Dear John (please call me Harold) It seems like the only exercise you’ve been getting lately is jumping to conclusions … do you really believe that when we become a Republic, we will be celebrating … under a Union Jack flag which screams out to the rest of the world that we remain subordinate to Great Britain? PS: And would you please stop referring to the Australian flag as the “flag of stars and crosses”. Its correct definition is the British Blue Ensign defaced by the southern cross and Federation star – or simply “Britain at Night”. Regards Harold. (Ausflag 2016).

The different standpoints of Ausflag and the ANFA are countered by the neutrality of Flags Australia. Founded in 1983 Flags Australia has published the vexillological journal, Crux Australis, every quarter since 1984 and is the leading Australian authority on flag design, usage and history. Flags Australia is “an advisory and research association concerned with all aspects of flag design, symbolism and protocol” (Burton 2006a: 151). There is much to be learned from Australian vexillogical organisations. In light of this work, each has been considered according to its approach, analysis, standpoint and vested interest.

Applications of the Australian National Flag

Ideologically the national flag is the metaphor of nation. Yet in Australia, as Vaughn articulates, the flag represents a particular version of history and identity that is dispersed
through “education” and various applications. Therefore, as White claims the Australian national flag is a symbol which is partisan for some, yet for others, it represents a “naturalness through familiarity” (2005: 118). It is precisely this “naturalness” that impels examination and produces questions regarding the meanings, potential for meaning and prevailing colonial symbolism that are enshrined in the private and public display of the national flag. Gordon Maitland’s work, *The Story of Australia’s Flags* (2015) is a reference book that traces the origins of Australia’s flags. Maitland notes,

… while the Royal Australian Navy has its ensign and the Royal Australian Air Force has its own flag, the Australian Army does not have a flag of its own; the Army’s flag is the Australian National Flag. The reason for this dates back to the 17th century formation of the British Army, and to the concept that the army and the people are one. In the Australian context … the Australian National Flag represents all Australians and is apolitical (2015: 19).

The claim that the national flag is “apolitical”, and that it represents all Australians is akin to arguing that the nation itself is not a political entity. Such claims well serve the discourse of nation-building; if the flag is not a political symbol, it is further rendered “banal” (drawing on Billig), and can be seamlessly ‘draped’ across bodies and inscribed onto cultural artefacts as a seemingly ‘innocent’ image. Paulo Kolstø draws attention to the need for national identity to be learnt, and argues “in the school of national identity construction … national symbols – flags, coats of arms, national anthems – play … a crucial role in nation-building and nation-maintenance” (2006: 676 emphasis in the original). Not only are Australians invited to watch their flag from afar, they are invited to “carry it in their hands, participate in flag parades, and flag hoisting ceremonies” (Kolstø 2006: 676). Maitland concurs, stating that his attachment to the flag was inculcated as a child, “I am of that generation which, at school, recited: I honour my God; I serve my King; I salute my Flag” (2015: 5).
Emotional Applications

In the early 1980s, as possibilities for new flag were mooted, the RSL became a strident protagonist in defence of the national flag. This was a battle which went to the core of their allegiance to both Great Britain and Australia, “…the RSL does not wish to see the flag under which Australian servicemen fought in two major wars … change to some new, and presumably less ‘loyal’ design” (Edwards 1985:3). At the time many RSL members held positions of authority in the nation’s public and private spheres. The RSL was, and remains a powerful voice concerning issues of nationalism and thus mobilised to distribute, “[K]eep this our flag forever” car stickers, gave backing to the ANFA, was forthright as it lobbied politicians and, “intense ‘consciousness-raising’ among the public – most of whom, if left alone, would probably remain fairly apathetic” (Edwards 1985: 3). Ex-serviceman Geoff Baker delivered a personal protest. Having lost his left eye he used his empty eye-socket as a billboard to display the national flag on a glass eye-ball, “I, and a lot of other blokes, fought under that flag and we are very proud of it” (Baker qtd. in Van Oudtshoorn 1984: 8).

The emotions embroiled in flags and war run deep, and the emotional responses elicited by the RSL are frequently contextualised as a normative reaction to the horrors of war. Military forces wear national colours and keep the flag ‘alive’ through remembrances of loss. In war, as an emblem of the homeland, the flag acts as a reminder of the nationalist inculcations that indoctrinate the right and duty to defend the nation. Flags become a tangible link to ‘home’, to what it represents, and to the justification of military violence in all its manifestations. It is the national insignia that fortifies the resolve to ‘win’, to combat and defeat the Other, regardless of the cost,

[T]he primordial rag dipped in the blood of a conquered enemy and lifted high on a stick – that wordless shout of victory and dominion – is a motif repeated millions of times in human existence (Smith 1975: 7).
In victory, flags become the embodiment of conquest, tangible signals from which the authority of a nation and its associated principles are represented.

Maitland cites Robin Northover’s poem “Our Flag”. Northover claims the Australian flag is the flag of “our laws and our language” and the Union Jack represents “[T]he rogues and schemers, the doers and dreamers” who “gave modern Australia birth” (qtd. in Maitland 2015: 313). The cost of this birthing, by the “rogues” and the “dreamers” was and is at the perpetual expense of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, whose languages, laws, lives and lands were both disregarded and disrespected. The poem concludes:

But there are thousands who’ve died for its honour,
And shed of their blood for OUR FLAG
(qtd. in Maitland 2015: 314 emphasis in the original).

Smith (2003) states that it is the belief in the principles and meanings of a flag over which people fight, die and kill. The flag transubstantiates into an external force under which are carried, “the fears and hopes, the myths, and the magic of those who carry it” (Smith 1975: 37). Flags are endowed with values and emotion that work, sometimes overtly but often effortlessly, to connect the individual to their ‘imagined’ collective. For the RSL, the emotional leverage of the flag enables this organisation to mobilise a force of public visibly and vocality whose raison d’etre is to daily inscribe the nation through the remembrance of battles fought, won or lost. The RSL demonstrates how symbols can evoke “powerful psychological responses that, when occurring simultaneously in multiple individuals or entire groups, leave a strong imprint on a community” (Butz 2009: 799).
Political Applications

Canberra’s Trademark

Political applications of the 1954 Australian national flag commenced with Menzies who was the first Prime Minister to authorise the flying of the flag, both day and night over Canberra (Cayley 1966). This tradition has been both maintained and fortified. The focal point of Australia’s new Parliament House is the flag and its flagpole. The flag is conceptualised as “the unifying symbol of the nation” (Joint House Department 1989: 7) and flies atop the flag mast, which at 81 metres tall, towers above the Parliament and is visible from most parts of the city, “establishing the Parliament’s presence and symbolically announcing the centre of Government in Australia” (Joint House Department 1989: 7). This imposing configuration is one of the largest stainless steel structures in the world and the statement it makes is completed by the flying of “a monster flag the size of a double decker bus” (Sydney Morning Herald 10 April 2013: 5).

In 2013, the Department of Parliamentary Services issued a tender for the manufacture and supply of a new batch of flags for Parliament House. Officials refused to reveal the expected costs although “in 1997 the cost was reported to be $2000 per flag” (Sydney Morning Herald 10 April 2013: 5). Each flag weighs around 25 kilograms. A set of ten flags are used on a rotational basis and changed on the first Wednesday of every month (Flag Fact Sheet: Parliament House, September 2015). The structure built to house the flag cost over $4.4 million and weighs 220 tonnes, when the flag was unfurled for the first time, Senator McClelland declared “the flag would become ‘Canberra’s trademark’. The flag, measuring 6.4 metres by 12.8 metres, will fly 24 hours a day and be floodlight at night” (Bartlett 1987: 6).
Flagging the Flag

According to Smith national flags typically symbolise the events from which a nation is founded, but they may well fly in the face of historical accuracy,

[T]he flag thus expresses a “civil religion” that political groups in the country try to control. This encourages people to support their view of the past, the future, the government and economic system, and relations between different groups of people (2003: 5).

Here Smith establishes that the national flag carries with it potent levels of power to which the eyes of the nation look in order to realise their imaginings of legitimacy, values and identity. In Australia during the 1990s both Prime Minister John Howard and One Nation leader, Pauline Hanson, made routine and effective use of the national flag for political gain. Avowed monarchist Prime Minister, John Howard was Australia’s 25th and second longest serving Prime Minister (1996-2007). Ian Ward (2012) credits Howard as being the first Prime Minister to adopt the routine ‘flagging’ of the national flag at his media conferences, as a result, “the flag’s fortunes have risen dramatically under the Prime Minister’s tutelage ... At once it is reassuring consistent and strong. And the flag has repaid Howard many times over” (Parker qtd. in Ward 2012: 75).

In 1995 Howard aired his support for the current design of the national flag. He noted there was no community desire to change the flag and argued that there were “more substantive issues of greater practical importance to the Australian people” (qtd. in Foley 1996a: 111). In 1996 Howard articulated that the focus of his Government was to form a cohesive national community, to re-enforce Australian values and to create trust between Government and the

82 Pauline Hanson’s One Nation party represents a conservative form of nationalism that is grounded in Protectionism and the White Australia Policy.
83 Foley concurs, “[T]his is, of course, undeniably true” and she hopes that Prime Minister Howard will not include the “matter of the national flag” at the next elections (1996a: 111).
people. An essential part of Howard’s vision was to protect and respect Australia’s national symbols and this included the introduction of a National Flag Day. \(^{84}\) Held on 3 September National Flag Day commemorates the 1901 first public flying of the flag. On that day, as the flag was being raised in Melbourne, schools throughout Australia were contacted via telegraph, and instructed to simultaneously raise their Australian flags during a special assembly (Kwan 2006). Proclaiming 3 September as National Flag Day Howard claimed “[O]ur national flag is a unifying force. It is a familiar and powerful image, and a focus for national pride” (qtd. in ANFA 2012b).\(^{85}\)

On Anzac Day 1996 Howard stated that legislation would be introduced which would further protect the national flag. The Flags Amendment Bill 1996 decreed that the design of the flag could only be changed through a referendum or plebiscite. If a poll were to take place then the current national flag must be included with any alternative designs (which is what happened in New Zealand, see Chapter One). This legislation became law in 1998 and the Flags Act 1953 was amended accordingly. Howard stated,

\[
\text{[T]his ensures that the people are consulted about their National Flag which is our oldest national symbol … All Australians can now be assured that the design of the National Flag – their Flag – is a matter for them and not for politicians or pressure groups (qtd. in ANFA 2012b).}
\]

Howard’s argument is persuasive and reassuring in its intent. His rhetoric firmly places the responsibility of the national flag in the hands of the people as it simultaneously satisfies his colonial affections. Graeme Orr explains that the 1998 amendment of the Flags Act was both political and symbolic, yet it lacks legal efficacy as the amendment can be repealed by a future

\(^{84}\) This day has been celebrated by the ANFA since 1984. In 1996 the Governor-General of Australia, William Deane, officially proclaimed 3 September as Australian National Flag Day. At ICV26 Michel Lupant, President of the Federation Internationale des Associations Vexillologiques (FIAV), noted that Australia is one of the few countries to dedicate a day to its national flag (3 September 2015).

\(^{85}\) See Appendix D for the Australian National Flag Prayer.
Parliament. Orr claims that Howard’s “was an act of political theatre, a dare to ‘stand up and be counted’ for the current flag’s design” (2012: 517). Anna Clark (2006) also draws attention to Howard’s relationship with the national flag and argues that the flag was explicit in the (re)engineering of Australian national identity. In 2004, a $31 billion federal education package was announced by Prime Minister Howard and the former Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson.86 The grant made funds available depending upon certain criteria being met which included the prominent display of the Government’s values framework and the installation of a functioning flag pole to fly the Australian flag. Funding was not allocated for additional flagpoles to fly the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander flags, the provision of which was deemed to be the responsibility of individual schools.

School remains a potent site for the learning of nationalism, as Hanson comments, “[M]y pride and patriotism were instilled in me from an early age when I watched the Australian flag raised every morning at school and sang the national anthem” (qtd. in Martino, Hanrahan & Crossley 2016). When Hanson delivered her first parliamentary address in 1996, she demanded for equality for all Australians, criticised the preferential treatment given to Aboriginal people, and reignited in the public consciousness a discourse of white supremacy,

[I]f politicians continue to promote separatism in Australia, they should not continue to hold their seats in this parliament. They are not truly representing all Australians, and I call on the people to throw them out. To survive in peace and harmony, united and strong, we must have one people, one nation, one flag87 (One Nation 2014).

86 Director of the AWM (2012 - ).
87 This slogan has successfully navigated both time and space. Versions of the refrain, have been employed to perpetuate as well as facilitate the endorsement of white colonial ideals, allowing them to (re)surface and be (re)invented. In 1891, a decade before the 1901 Federation of Australia, politician Henry Parkes addressed a Sydney Federal Convention advocating for the six separate British colonies unite. Parkes states, “the time has come when Australian people shall be one, henceforth and forever … one people [to] inherit one destiny” (The Henry Parkes Foundation n.d). In 1898 the Australasian Federation League of New South Wales added the words “one flag” to Parkes’ slogan. Federation, a ubiquitous white, patriarchal vision, was thus framed by the slogan “one people, one destiny, one flag”.
Hanson officially launched her One Nation party in 1997. The Australian flag was omnipresent throughout. Orr (2010) argues that the Australian national flag was in fact fundamental to Hanson’s One Nation party. Numerous images can be found online of Hanson draped in the national flag. At the height of One Nation’s success, the party secured nearly 23 per cent of the Queensland 1998 state election and won 11 seats on National Party preferences (Law 2013: 22). In the 2016 federal election One Nation under the leadership of Hanson secured four seats in the Senate. Hanson continues to endorse “the one flag”,

[W]e as Australians have never been asked in a referendum whether we endorse or recognise the Aboriginal flag … But it is flown everywhere, especially above government buildings. Flying two Australian flags is extremely divisive … we should be united under the one flag, the Australian flag (Hanson qtd. in Davies 2016).

Michael Anderson argues that flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags on government buildings signifies that Australia recognises Indigenous sovereignty. Therefore Hanson’s rejection of the Aboriginal flag is understood by Anderson as an “unease” which “stems from this recognition of our sovereignty” (Mandybur 2016). Fundamental to Hansonite ideology is the premise that social division results from the “special treatment” afforded to a particular group. This principle, as the above quote demonstrates, evidently extends to the public display of the Aboriginal flag.

Perceived threats to Australia’s sovereignty are used to spruik political interests. Former Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, took national flag usage to a new level. In November 2104, leaders of the twenty most economically developed countries in the world, known as the G20, gathered in Brisbane. For this two-day event, 282 flags, 19 of which were Australian, were purchased and taxpayers were charged over $100,000 (Gartrell 2015: 11). Highlighting both the cost and importance of flags, Adam Gartrell (2015), draws attention to Australia’s Federal MPs and senators who, in the latter half of 2014, spent more than $500,000 on
Australian flags. Of interest is the ratio, which indicates both the pragmatic and ideological nature of flags and their value when used as a party political prop. The Liberal Government spent $330,000 compared to the Labor Party who spent $130,000. Abbott’s penchant for using Australian flags at press conferences was seen to reflect the discourse of ‘national security’ which he frequently touted. Tony Wright (2015) claims that Abbott’s national emergency alert system could be understood by the number of flags he employed. For example, when he delivered his national security statement he stood in front of six Australian flags. On another occasion, Charles Waterstreet remarks, Abbott “outflagged the enemy when he announced his national security speech … The killer surprise was to use 10 Australian flags … researchers have noticed that the more flags behind Abbott, the less he speaks” (2015: 34). When employed as ‘visual megaphones’, flags can ‘speak’ louder than words.

So what is the purpose behind the multiplicity of flags? Is it an assertion of political credibility or just one of political fear-mongering? On one hand Eriksen argues the “[O]mnipresence of flags” demonstrates a need by the state, “to give material evidence for a postulated imagined community” (2007: 9). In this light, the flags employed by Abbott form a backdrop of discursive affirmation, a statement to demonstrate Australia’s legitimacy, power and authority. On the other hand, Billig notes that, for established nations, as the ‘imagined community’ becomes ‘inhabited’, as the poets are replaced by politicians and the epic ballads are replaced by government reports, the ‘community’ and its place in the world “are not so much imagined, but their absence becomes unimaginable” (2013: 77). What Billig alludes to is the potential for the ‘nation’ and all it stands for, to be rendered inconceivable. When the nation and the existence of its members is threatened, the public display of tangible national iconography provides redress for the nation’s fears, “[W]hen threats arise, national identification may increase, which may in turn lead to symbolic manifestations of heightened national identity” (Butz 2009: 783). From this standpoint, the rhetoric of ‘national emergency’,
so frequently used during Abbott’s term as Prime Minister, inscribes in the flag an emotional appeal to nationalism through threat of the loss of freedom and sovereignty.

The current Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull asserts that the Australian flag will never change and furthermore he states that Australians, in particular younger Australians, “don’t deconstruct the Australian flag and … say, ‘well, there’s a Union Jack, that’s the flag of another country,’ they look at it as one Australian symbol” (Baxendale 2018). Turnbull thus ‘flags’ the national flag as a signifier of Australian nationalism that is banally accepted by the populace. If he is correct, then borrowing from Vaughn, it is indeed a “matter of education”, for if, as Turnbull asserts, Australians “don’t deconstruct” their flag, then a deconstruction of the flag though education is in order. For example, how would Australians react if they knew that the British Union Jack is the official point of honour on their national flag? Guenter provides evidence that demonstrates students in America associate British colonialism with Australia’s flag. If a similar study was undertaken in Australia what would be revealed? Turnbull’s comments were a strategic attempt to deflect attention from the flag, but in reality they highlight the need for new debates which move away from banal acceptance and a lack of ‘deconstruction’, towards a more focused and contemporary understanding of the nation’s flag and its symbolism.

Social Applications

Cronulla 2005

Cronulla Beach is located in the Sutherland Shire. As mentioned in Chapter One it was here that Forby Sutherland was buried. The Sutherland Shire lays claim to being the ‘Birthplace of Modern Australia’:

Australia’s most historic place, where the two great captains, Cook and Phillip, first landed, first encountered Aborigines, first raised the flag, first observed a bush landscape utterly strange to them, and first took steps to explore … It is beyond
comprehension that the ‘Birthplace of Modern Australia’ has been allowed to slip into relative obscurity … it has been ignored and mistreated throughout our nation’s entire history. In any country but Australia, Kurnell would be a shrine! (Salt 2000: 7-9).

“Australia’s most historic place” is the site of the original onslaught of violence and injustices forced upon Aboriginal peoples. Suvendrini Perera identifies the Sutherland shire as a Christian enclave of Anglo-Celtic whiteness, “a white sanctuary” which is threatened and constricted by “the great Middle Eastern melting pots of Sydney” (Perera 2007: 4). The racialised socio-spatial-ness of ‘the shire’ reflects the racial hierarchies which underpin every level, place and space of the white Australian nation. Perera argues “invisibilised ‘white sovereign violence’ continues to produce and patrol the limits of the nation in the form of the unquestioned and unquestionable law of the land” (2007: 5). Maria Giannacopoulos contends that Australian law has been forged out of violence yet “disguises its status as such by circulating a series of knowledges about itself which operate to deny its relation to violence” (2006). She asserts that white sovereignty has been established through the repudiation of colonial violence in all its formations. Moreton-Robinson and Nicoll claim that the threat of violence is inherent to patriarchal white sovereignty and is ‘legitimised’ through the “disavowal of white race privilege”, which they say, “works to negate its relationship to racial oppression and mask its possessiveness” (2006: 155). They assert that the actions of white males in 2005, which has entered the Australian lexicon as the “Cronulla Riots”, was in fact a protest in that it was a form of organised violence, driven by the inherent white patriarchal right of ‘possession’. The beach is territory to be defended, a site “where collective national ownership and identity are on public display: a place of pleasure, leisure and pride” (Moreton-Robinson and Nicoll 2006: 149).

Against this backdrop outrage boiled over when it was reported that two surf lifesavers had been in an ‘unprovoked’ attack by a large group of men of ‘Middle Eastern appearance’ (El-Khoury 2012). On 11 December 2005, under the apparent threat of a non-white bodied
invasion and roused by an SMS call to arms, a crowd some 5000 strong of mostly young, white, frequently shirtless, Anglo-Celtic Australian males gathered to reclaim their beach. The preferred weapon of choice was the Australian national flag which vicariously adorned the ‘soldiers’ as they marched into battle. Defiantly armed with the Australian flag, fuelled by alcohol and racist chants, the ‘troops’ rallied, they “chased, attacked, beat and bashed any person in their sight of Middle Eastern appearance” (El-Khoury 2012: xiii). Giannacopoulos (2006) states that it is through the act of naming ‘others’ that the Australian nation is reproduced as a white possession. She cites a media report in which the riotous white youth are exempted from racial descriptors. The un-raced youth are positioned as if beyond identity, they are ‘legitimate’ and ‘local’; in contrast are the men of “Middle Eastern appearance”. Giannacopoulos argues, the proper capitalisation of “Middle Eastern” effectively delegates “ethnicity to the non-belonging youths” (2006 emphasis in the original).88 This is a discursive endemic, a phenomenon which has shaped the formation of a white Australian identity since first contact, “as long as law-breakers are mainstream, that is white and from an English speaking background, their ethnic group is protected by the absence of reference to it” (Sykes 1989: 16). Racial referencing is thus a strategy which is both explicit and implicit in that it constructs a standpoint which enforces nationalistic ideals through the marked identification of minority groups. The metonymic image of the Cronulla Riots was the white, young male swathed in the Australian flag. The flag, “emerged as a rallying point and signal proclamation of a ‘genuine’ Australian ethos” (Burton 2006b: 9).

As the battle for Cronulla went into the night Australian citizens, Hadi Khawaja and Ali Ammar sought revenge. They broke into the Brighton-le-Sands RSL club in South Sydney, stole the national flag and proceeded to burn it in front of a crowd of 150 people. In Australia it is not a criminal offence to burn the national flag, “burning or otherwise wilfully desecrating

88 See also Hage in Thornton (2017).
national flags as a form of protest against the established order is extraordinarily common, because symbolically a national flag is the nation-state” (Foley 1996a: 150 emphasis in the original). The flag burning protest was broadcast on television. For Giannacopoulos this media event conjured

colonial images of violence supported by the flag of empire … It was the British flag that Cook had forced into the earth upon invasion and it was in such manoeuvres that white sovereignty began to be violently asserted (2006).

Eighteenth century colonial violence committed under the colours of the Union Jack transcends time to re-emerge in Sutherland’s shire of the twenty first century. Giannacopoulos conceptualises the forceful impalement of the land by the “flag of empire” as the beginning point from which the potent assertion of white sovereignty continues through the on-going assailment of Indigenous people and theft of sovereign land.

Khawaja was sentenced to three months jail for breaking into the RSL and burning the flag (Wallace 2006) and Ammar, 16 at the time, served seven months (Olding 2015). Both men publicly apologised and Ammar also walked the Kokoda Track89 as part of his ‘rehabilitation’. The magistrate, Paul Falzon argued that if a window had been broken, or a trophy stolen, the significance of the crime would have been less, “[T]he emotional injury in this case is somewhat amplified” and because of the context, Falzon deemed, “[I]t’s vandalism of a particular kind. It’s extreme vandalism” (qtd. in Wallace 2006). According to Butz (2009) people who possess deep psychological attachments to their flag may feel a heightened sense of threat by its desecration. This assertion goes some way to explain both Falzon’s comments and the punishment meted out to Khawaja and Ammar. At Cronulla the Australian flag was

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89 In 1942 Australian soldiers fought their most significant battle of the Second World War. On a 96 kilometre narrow and rugged jungle pass in Papua New Guinea, known as the Kokoda track, Australian soldiers defended Port Moresby from Japanese soldiers who planned to capture and use it as a base from which to bomb and potentially invade Northern Queensland.
employed as a territorial signifier; a status symbol of segregation denoting who ‘grew here’ and who ‘flew here’. Australian ‘values’ were made incarnate through the flag which was,

inscribed on bodies in, multiple forms: blazoned on bikinis and backpacks, tattooed on to arms and torsos, painted on faces like war paint, wrapped around shoulders like a trophy: a performance of native-ised territoriality (Perera 2006).

In their analysis of the aftermath of the Cronulla Riots Moreton-Robinson and Nicoll state that ‘race-blind’ responses were delivered, “[T]aking race and racism out of the equation enabled patriarchal white sovereignty to produce a colour blind and power evasive discourse” (Moreton-Robinson and Nicoll 2006: 155). Giannacopoulos claims that white violence was discursively endorsed and thus ‘legitimated’ by Prime Minister Howard who said, “I do not accept that there is underlying racism in this country” (2006). Furthermore, in what can be read as a tacit approval of the flag’s use as a weapon, Howard refused to criticise the Australian flag-waving, flag-wearing whites of Cronulla, “I would never condemn people for being proud of the Australian flag” (qtd. in Ireland 2015: 37). There certainly was no thought of punishment for those who wielded the flag as an agent of terror,

[A]fter all, if they chant racist slogans whilst carrying the Australian flag their violence comes to signify as something other than criminal ethnic violence. White violence at Cronulla beach is subtly sanctioned by creating a discursive distinction between legitimate violence and ethnic criminal violence (Giannacopoulos 2006 emphasis in the original).

Twenty first century racial violence is thus symbolically dispensed through the Australian flag, a continuation of the veneration of the Union Jack and the forced impalement of white sovereignty that refuses interrogation.
Post Cronulla

Six weeks after the Cronulla Riots, at the 2006 Australia Day “Big Day Out” music festival, the Australian flag once more became a prevalent symbol of white supremacy. As a result, the following year 2007 festival-goers were asked to refrain from wearing or carrying the flag. Festival organiser, Ken West, described the display of nationalism and use of the flag at the 2006 event, “as intolerable … The Australian flag was being used as gang colours. It was racism disguised as patriotism” (qtd. in Mulvey 2007). West was immediately vilified by Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd, the RSL and ANFA. Prime Minister John Howard was outraged, calling the suggestion to ‘ban’ the Australian flag, “offensive … to millions of Australians” before continuing, “[F]lags don’t have legs and arms, if anyone was breaking the law at Cronulla … they should be dealt with by the authorities” (Mulvey 2007). Flags however are mobilised through the “legs and arms” of the corporeal body, as the epigraph states, flags can signify group unity and purpose. When bodies are wrapped in the flag, they are metaphorically enveloped in the arms of the nation – the body transforms to become ‘the nation’ and all it represents.

Foley was also critical about banning the flag. She argues that if “you’re intimidating people, it does not matter really whether you’re doing it by waving a flag, or a tea towel, or a photo of the Sydney Harbour Bridge” (qtd. in Huxley 2009). Foley’s comments effectively trivialise the flag’s transformative capacity and are somewhat surprising given that she previously acknowledges the national flag as being representative of the nation-state. To profess that there is no differentiation between using the flag and a tea towel or a photograph as a means of intimidation is extraordinary. By refusing to acknowledge the flag’s very real power and influence she relegates it to that of a “banal” and seemingly innocuous everyday

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90 See also West in Thornton (2017).
object. In this instance, far from being a banal signifier of national identity the flag, as this photograph demonstrates, has the transformative capability to reconfigure and take on a ‘new’ life as an agent of racism, for which, unlike the discipline meted out against Khawaja and Ammar, there is no punishment.

Figure 5: Australian protestors use the national flag to cover their faces (Image: Sydney Morning Herald 2009).

The white body en-masse, wrapped in the Australian flag, becomes the embodiment of the White Australian Nation: a domestic body asserting sovereignty and ownership through the fabric of the flag and acts of terror. Scruby argues that it is the Union Jack which emboldens white Australians, the Union Jack “allowed our flag to be used as a racist symbol, allowing those of Anglo descent to say, ‘I’m more Australian than you’” (qtd. in Huxley 2009).

National flags signal group membership as they simultaneously reflect the nation’s core values and belief systems, thus “national symbols often play prominent roles in protests of actions or events that are perceived as countering these beliefs” (Butz 2009: 787). Joanne Frare
(2009) argues that the levels of flag-display behaviour seen at both Cronulla 2005 and Big Day Out 2006, brought the issue of flag-usage into the public consciousness. With increasing levels of flag-waving Frare identified the need for research and conducted a study from which to better understand the social implications of Australian flag-display behaviour and large scale intergroup relations. Frare’s findings “suggests that flags are able to express powerful, and even sometimes hostile, expressions of national attachment and sentiment” (2009: 49). Butz asserts that events such as Cronulla “suggest that national symbols may play a role in collective nationalistic responses to outgroups” (2009: 788). Chris Sibley, William Hoverd and John Duckitt note national flags “automatically activate normative values for ingroup members” (2011: 494). From these findings it can be established that aggressive acts of flag-waving behaviour, such as those seen at Cronulla, are synonymous with a form of nationalism that permits the forceful promotion of national values to be conveyed through expressions of hostility. As a result the flag may well impede notions of national inclusion for minority groups, which in turn may impact psychological health and well-being (Butz 2009, see also Butz et al. 2007; Sibley et al. 2011). Since Cronulla, at every Australia Day there has been a mass mobilisation of a cheap red, white and blue army. A vast array of products, a “menacing display, in the everyday space” which possess a “two-faced ability simultaneously to camouflage and to stage racist violence” (Perera 2007:12). Currently Australian ‘reclaimers’ continue to use the Australian flag as their trademark statement, donning it in a multitude of fashions.

‘Reclaiming’ Australia

Like the knights of old sporting their coats of arms, the Australian flag draped around the body of the citizen becomes a twenty first-century-marker of the corpus of nation. This modern-day coat-of-arms represents colonial beliefs and core values and is used to deflect perceived threats to nationalist discourse. For close to 250 years Australian national identity and
membership into the nation has been regulated by norms from which white citizens have benefited. National identity, values and symbols are closely aligned to concepts of whiteness and are protectively guarded. *Reclaim Australia* is a far-right nationalist group which protests against what it refers to as the “Islamisation of Australia” and is an example of another group which has been mobilised through the national flag’s symbolism of ‘White Australia’. At a *Reclaim Australia* rally an elderly white man, wearing a matching Australian flag cap and t-shirt, holds a sign, adorned with Australian flags which states: “OUR COUNTRY OUR LAWS NOT YOURS” (Howden 2015b: 5). At a similar rally, Roxley Foley, Aboriginal Tent Embassy caretaker, stood close to a *Reclaim Australia* group and in a statement of Indigenous sovereignty and resistance, held a sign which read, “not yours to reclaim” (Gorrey 2015).

![Anti-Islam protesters in Martin Place armed with Australian flags and flag-decorated clothes (Image: Alcock 2015).](image)

Figure 6: Anti-Islam protesters in Martin Place armed with Australian flags and flag-decorated clothes (Image: Alcock 2015).
“Symbols of that whiteness will always engender fear” (bell hooks 2009: 10).

Flags are imbued with beliefs and values which are in a constant state of renewal, reinforcement and contestation. As noted it is in the political interest to take charge of the flag given its associated and very real power. To put this another way, jurisdiction of the flag “can control an important element in the battle over social relations within its territory” (Leib & Webster 2007: 31). The flag is thus a vessel of socialisation which carries with it the potential to signify dissent, dependent upon the individual / group’s subject position. In order to explore this further I discuss the racial conflict and divisions which have been elicited through the display and the endorsement of the Confederate battle flag of the American South.

For many Southern whites, the Confederate battle flag represents the battles fought by their ancestors during the American Civil War. This flag proudly represents their heritage. For others the battle flag is “a symbolic container which condenses all that it means to be a (white) Southerner” (Leib & Webster 2007: 32). For some, both black and white, the flag is a broadly associated as being a symbol of rebellion or defiance. For the majority of Southerners of African-American descent, the flag is a symbol of racial discrimination, hatred and fear. bell hooks states that

the face of terror will always be white. And symbols of that whiteness will always engender fear. The confederate flag, for example, will never stand for heritage for black folks. It still awakens fear in the minds and imaginations of elder black folks for whom it signaled [sic] the support of white racist assault on blackness. White folks who mask their denial of white supremacy by mouthing slogans like ‘heritage not hate’ to support their continued allegiance to this flag fail to see that their refusal to acknowledge what this ‘heritage’ means for black folks is itself an expression of white racist power and privilege. For the confederate flag is a symbol of both heritage and hate. The history of the confederacy will always evoke the memory of white oppression of black folks with rebel flags, guns, fire, and the hanging noose – all symbols of hate (2009: 10-11).
hooks draws attention to a multitude of traumas which are evoked by the Confederate flag. She identifies how white discourses work to position this symbol as an innocuous statement of “heritage”. Furthermore, hooks argues that support of the Confederate battle flag is tantamount to a refusal to engage with African-American perspectives, which in turn further cements the white agenda.

The correlations that can be drawn to the Australian context are of interest. To claim that the Australian flag represents ‘our’ heritage and democratic way of life mutes Indigenous perspectives and experiences. The “continued allegiance” for the Australian flag, the “refusal to acknowledge” what it represents to Indigenous peoples is, as hooks states, “an expression of white racist power and privilege.” Echoing notions of the ‘haunted’ nation, hooks goes on to argue that ongoing allegiance to white superiority constrains and deforms the psyche of both blacks and whites. She contends that it is the responsibility of white people to unlearn and contest normative systems of practice and thought.

The American Civil War was fought over the Southerners’ determination to defend its right to own slaves. In defeat, the Confederacy re-established itself with racial vitriol and enforced segregation, “[B]etween 1882 and 1968 almost 5000 lynchings took place with the express purpose of subjugating African Americans with terror” (O’Malley 2015a: 15). As the black civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s took hold, the Confederate flag took on a new life and became a symbol of opposition to the civil rights movement. On 17 June 2015, white supremacist Dylann Roof, aged 21, murdered 9 black church-goers during a bible-study meeting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church in Charleston. Roof’s website sported a manifesto of white supremacy and photographs of him with a Confederate flag.

The Confederate flag was first flown from the dome of the South Carolina state house in 1962. The Reverend Clementa Pinckney, civil rights activist and state senator who was shot
dead by Roof, “was forced to walk by the living insult of that flag each day when he went to work for his Charleston constituents” (O’Malley 2015a: 15). As a result of Roof’s race hate crime, calls were made to remove the Confederate flag. The flag’s defenders however, evoked the argument that the flag is part of South Carolina’s heritage. The flag represents “the sacrifice of lives on the battlefield in the Confederate cause” and they claimed that if the flag came down then, “calls to change street and place names honouring Confederate leaders” might well be made (McLeod 2015: 15). In his tribute to Reverend Pinckney, Former President, Barack Obama eulogised,

> [F]or too long, we were blind to the pain that the Confederate flag stirred into many of our citizens … we all have to acknowledge, the flag has always represented more than just ancestral pride … Removing the flag from this state’s capital would not be an act of political correctness. It would not an insult to the valour of Confederate soldiers. It would simply be acknowledgment that the cause for which they fought, the cause of slavery, was wrong. It would be one step in an honest accounting of America’s history, a modest but meaningful balm for so many unhealed wounds (qtd. in O’Malley 2015b: 26).

Obama’s address leaves little room for dissent as he dispels the myths which discursively connect the flag to battlefield valour and heritage. Obama argues that the Confederate flag, woven out of racist practices and rhetoric, has no place in the current public sphere. The Confederate flag was lowered on 10 July 2015, “and suddenly it seemed utterly preposterous that the ugly banner had been tolerated there for so long”, a crowd of several thousand which was as much “white as it was black” cheered and sang as the flag was finally lowered (O’Malley 2015a: 15).

**Conclusion**

The symbolic and pedagogical power of flags can be understood through knowledge which explores both their origins and applications. Work done in the field of vexillology that includes a careful analysis of the manifold ways flags are deployed, reveals how flags can generate and channel an array of social, political and emotional reactions. In Australia, flags elicit a range
of responses that accrue around various connections and disconnections with nationalist ideologies. In addition, as demonstrated, there is a long-standing confusion and ambivalence associated with the flags of Australia. What emerges from this study is the extent to which flags signify multifariously at this current juncture in the twenty first century. For some, they are symbols of allegiance, representing national fervour, identification, and a sense of belonging. For others, the national flag signifies exclusion. A sense of the depth and diversity of feelings generated by the national flag and its colonial insignia is at the heart of this research, and while much of this has been discussed above, a more thorough appraisal of the national flag will be gleaned through an analysis of the responses of some Indigenous people in Chapter Seven. But first, before Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reactions to the national flag are considered, I focus on the long-standing resistance to colonial rule. Understanding the struggle, determination and resilience of Indigenous resistance underpins the final chapter as reactions to the flag are not isolated events: they have been forged out of an era of resistance that began in 1770.
CHAPTER SIX: Acts of Resistance: Spanning Time and Distance

Grass roots reality was always the prime focus of Kevin’s work. Through his art, words and actions, he sought to break through the code of silence that keeps the wider population ignorant of the daily reality of ‘living Black’ in this land … Kevin’s life is only one example of the thousands of Kooris, Murris, Yolgnu, Yapa, Palawar, Nungas, Nyoomaahs and Gooris, earning life’s breath on a daily basis, who inspire each other by acts of courage, bravery and determination, resisting, persisting and surviving – hoping, eventually, for ‘the boat people to grow up proper way’ for this land.\(^1\)

(Gilbert & Williams 1996: 56-57).

Introduction

This chapter is about resistance. Since first contact Indigenous people in this country have resisted and actively opposed the colonial imposition of the British Empire. A range of responses to colonialism are discussed in this chapter which relate to the realities of “living Black” in a nation which has long been subjected to the dominant discourses of white supremacy through policy and practice. In order to understand how resistance by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been, and continues to be expressed, I investigate a variety of events and reactions. I begin the chapter with an exploration of art, which as a multi-layered expression of Aboriginal Law, is both a primary mode of communication and an important site of resistance. I discuss this through the life of Kwat-Kwat artist, Yakaduna, also known as Tommy McCrae / McRae (c. 1835-1901). McCrae’s ink pen on paper drawing, Corroboree depicts a number of flags and presents the viewer with a variety of hypotheses in relation to how the work produces meaning. I will provide a reading of this work produced by the great grandfather of Burnum Burnum\(^2\) (Swain 1988), who planted the Aboriginal flag at Dover, England in 1988. Chapter Six takes a chronological path examining events and people who form links in a long and interconnected chain of resistance, and who, as the epigraph suggests, refuse to be silent. I conclude the chapter by discussing a significant act of colonial resistance.

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\(^1\) Kevin Gilbert was an activist, poet, playwright and artist. His ashes were buried at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1993 (Jopson 2012: 12).

\(^2\) Burnum Burnum was an activist, author and educator.
Two hundred years after Cook made his land claim for the British Crown, Eddie Koiki Mabo, a member of the Torres Strait Meriam nation, pursued a lengthy High Court battle against the State of Queensland which resulted in a ruling that established the Meriam people as the sovereign owners of their land and extinguished the colonial doctrine of *terra nullius.*

**Art as Communication**

Aboriginal art is a long-standing practice that has been grounded in over 60,000 years of knowledge and tradition (Boulter 1991). According to Wally Caruana “[A]rt is central to Aboriginal life. Whether it is made for political, social, utilitarian or didactic purposes – and these functions constantly overlap – art is inherently connected to the spiritual domain” (2012:7). Aboriginal art is an ancient mode of communication that centres on the spiritual life of Aboriginal people called “the Dreaming” by Europeans. The term “Dreaming” is derived from the Dreamtime, an expression coined by the anthropologist Baldwin Spencer. In 1926, Spencer claimed that the Arrernte word *altyerre* meant both ‘time of creation’ and ‘dream’ (Elkin 1966; Arthur and Morphy 2005). In this context “the Dreaming” refers to the creator ancestors and supernatural beings which traversed the continent and formulated laws regarding social and religious behaviour that constituted the foundational premise for Aboriginal Law. Caruana suggests that “the Dreaming” formulates “the ideological framework by which human society retains a harmonious equilibrium with the universe – a charter and mandate that has been sanctified over time” (2012:10). Before colonisation, Aboriginal Law was understood and expressed in a variety of ways such as song, dance, storytelling and art. Aboriginal Law constitutes,

the highest law, no-one can ever sign it away … The law transcends all things … The law is who we are, we are also the law. We carry it in our lives. The law is everywhere, we breathe it, we eat it, we sing it, we live it (Watson qtd. in Gilbert & Williams 1996: 43).

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93 See the National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT) website [www.nativetitle25.gov.au](http://www.nativetitle25.gov.au)
Aboriginal Law, is thus a set of practices that regulates all facets of existence and finds expression in all manner of artistic expression. Unlike Western law Aboriginal Law is not an evolving entity; rather, it is an established foundation upon which life is understood. The Law is inclusive of all living and non-living things and sees these as interrelated. The Law is both a set of instructions and a mode of storytelling that finds a prominent place in art-works.

Aboriginal people customarily attained status through the acquisition of knowledge. Art as a manifestation of knowledge asserts varying levels of authority dependent upon the cultural status of both artist and viewer. According to Kevin Gilbert, “art communicates more directly [and] has more significance to us than the written language. … We have presented our oral tradition and reinforced it with our artworks” (Gilbert & Williams 1996: 28). Pre-colonisation, Aboriginal artistic expression was based on protocol and was both personal and collaborative; art was the affirmation of a complex web of inter-relations (Mundine 2006). Aboriginal art is therefore a multi-layered, powerful and complex form of cultural expression that encompasses ethical responsibility and social organisation.

Galarrwuy Yunupingu observes that,

[W]hen we paint – whether it is on our bodies for ceremony or on bark or canvas for the market – we are not painting for fun or profit. We are painting as we have always done to demonstrate our continuing link with our country and the rights and responsibilities we have to it. Furthermore, we paint to show the rest of the world that we own this country, and that the land owns us (qtd. in Boulter 1991: 23).

Aboriginal art is understood here to be a cultural responsibility, a conduit which links the land to its people and the people to their land. Yunupingu claims that many colonial artworks depict acts of possession authenticated by images which feature the Union Jack. Colonial artworks formulate a visual narrative of (dis)possession that continues to both inform and substantiate the discursive framing of whiteness in relation to official narratives of Australian history.
Traditional artistic expression includes motifs which encompass a range of meanings specific to individual groups and nations. Significance is reflected in the patterns that mark the bodies of individuals and the shields of the numerous clans. The importance of this cultural form of identification is explored by Dennis O’Brien. The Kaurna shield is a symbol of his clan, the Kaurna Miyurna people of South Australia,

[T]he shield is Kaurna, it’s our identity. The shield is important and the markings are significant for us. It is one of the symbols that represent us, who we are and what we’re about, where we’re from. Nations around the world have different flags and banners that represent who they are. The shield is our flag (O’Brien qtd. in Osborne & Simpkin 2015: 89).

Caruana is interested in how religious images and designs make meaning. He notes that when motifs are applied to a shield or a body, for example, they are capable of producing a significant change in perception and can “transform the nature of the thing from a mundane state to an extraordinary one, from the profane to the sacred” (2012: 14). The Kaurna shield thus represents an ancient cycle of continuity that is both practical and spiritual and encompasses a complex belief system which unambiguously connects people to place and to one another.

The Gweagal shield was taken during Cook’s first encounter with Aboriginal people at Kurnell in 1770 and was subsequently ‘gifted’ to the British Museum, London where it has been held since. In 2015 the shield was ‘reloaned’ to Australia and was a central part of the Encounters exhibition. The Gweagal shield holds special significance for Shayne Williams, a Dharawal Elder. The shield symbolises Aboriginal resistance both past and present (Osbourne and Simpkin 2015) and forms a tangible link with the past that signifies the resilience and ongoing survival the oldest continuing living culture on earth. Elizabeth Coleman states that Aboriginal art forms should be considered as forms of insignia and their status comparable to the European coat of arms system (2005). While Coleman’s focus is concerned with protecting
Aboriginal artwork from appropriation her analogy draws attention to the many Aboriginal nations and the symbols which established group or clan membership and associated cultural pride. Designs are encoded with meaning and thus, cultural symbols directly connect clans to their land and provide a link for the maintenance of customs and ways of life. Cultural symbols, such as those found on the Kaurna and Gweagal shields, also convey specific messages relating to ownership, knowledge and identity which in turn uphold and strengthen social structures.

Yakaduna, also known as Tommy McCrae, was a talented artist whose work captured the exact markings of his south-eastern Murray River tribe, and according to Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll are, “seductively detailed for those who are now attempting to reconstruct the significance of these individual designs” (2014: 68). McCrae’s importance is noted by Caruana who identifies him as a nineteenth century forerunner to the urban and rural artists of today, who use art to offer a variety of perspectives on a world with which much of its audience has generally been unfamiliar. At the same time, by implicitly questioning and challenging contemporary attitudes, they articulate the concerns and aspirations of Aboriginal people in modern society (2012: 222).

The education of white Australia through Aboriginal art has been a long-standing practice. McCrae’s illustrations attest to this. Through his artwork McCrae keeps his culture alive and communicates the richness of his world, which had existed for millennia prior to colonisation.
Tommy McCrae (c.1835-1901) and his artwork *Corroboree*. 94

**Background**

Tommy McCrae was a member of the Kwat-Kwat people who lived on the central Murray River border between New South Wales and Victoria. McCrae illustrated both the traditional and the contemporary through his use of paper and ink. Hetti Perkins describes McCrae’s drawings as “incredibly lively”: “I feel that if I were to give the paper a jolt the figures would all start up and continue what they were doing” (2010: 176). The significance of McCrae’s work is noted elsewhere, “McCrae tells his stories as an ancient animator might, compiling frame after frame of illustrations; chapters of Aboriginal daily life and the impacts of colonisation in simple and uncoloured truth” (*Koori Mail* 18 November 2015: 57). Prior to providing a reading of McCrae’s ink sketch *Corroboree* (c. 1890), I discuss events that occurred during the early part of the nineteenth century which became a sustained focus of McCrae’s artwork.

In 1835, at approximately the time of Tommy McCrae’s birth, Australian born colonist John Batman secured vast tracts of land from the local Aboriginal people of Port Phillip. 95 Agnes Bell notes, Batman, William Buckley, 96 and a small party of “Batman’s aborigines” bargained for some six hundred thousand acres of land, “…the Batman aborigines danced and sang to show the local groups that they came as friends. To signify that they understood, the local aborigines replied with a short corroboree” (1965: 5-6). Although a corroboree had been

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94 The word corroboree refers to Aboriginal cultural ceremonies which use music, dance and song to depict everyday life and events both traditional and contemporary. Corroboree themes “include the ways of birds, animals and fish; the movements of the storm, the flood and the sea … and the Aborigines’ experience of, and interest in, European and other non-native objects and pursuits …” (Elkin 1966: 289).
95 The Wathaurong people, who McCrae refers to as the “Melbourne tribe” (Carroll 2014: 248).
96 Buckley was a convict who was transported to Australia for life. He left England on the HMS *Calcutta* in 1803, one of 307 convicts assigned with establishing a settlement at Port Phillip (Level 2008). The settlement failed and Buckley absconded. He was eventually found and adopted by the local Wathaurong people, ‘the Melbourne tribe’. Buckley lived with them from 1803-1835 and was known as Murrangurk. He learnt and participated in the local Aboriginal life and he had a wife (Morgan 1967; Sayers 1994; Maynard & Haskins 2016). In 1835 Buckley re-entered white society as it sought to establish a settlement on the Yarra River. Buckley was then paid by the British authorities to act as an interpreter and he accompanied John Wedge and Batman, the ‘pioneers’ of Melbourne, to secure land from the Wathaurong tribe, for Batman’s new settlement. (Carroll 2014).
performed in the spirit of friendship, this event, referred to as Batman’s treaty, was the beginning of an era of betrayal. Batman’s treaty was deemed invalid by the British authorities and had no legal substance, it was however “an important first step in this process [of white settlement … and] is symbolic of European relations with the Kulin, in that self-interest and deceit were central to colonisation” (Yarra City Council 2016).

Following Batman’s treaty the landscape was systematically alienated. Convicts were recruited from Hobart and Sydney to build roads for the settlement and the first land sale attracted over 200 hundred people. Land sales were marked by a bell-man, “a colourful figure mounted on his old grey horse and carrying a red ‘Auction’ flag” (Bell 1965: 29). Demand for land in and around Melbourne led to further sales. Williamstown97 became Melbourne’s first suburb, and a flag was employed as a signpost, “[Y]ou enter the bush at a place marked with a red flag which indicates where the track to Melbourne commences” (Bell 1965: 20). In the early years of the settlement, Melbournians also gleaned important information from the high ground of ‘Flagstaff Hill’. Here flags of different colours and shapes were hoisted up a tall mast to identify the origins of visiting ships: “a flag shape denoted a ship from overseas while a pennant was the signal for an interstate vessel” (Royal Historical Society of Victoria n.d.).

By the end of 1844 Melbourne had a population of over twenty thousand and was the second largest town in “The Land of Promise” (Bell 1965: 41). Land possession enabled manufacturers and pastoralists to further drive Aboriginal people off their country. In the 1850s gold was discovered. Tens of thousands of people from around the world came to Victoria, via Melbourne. As a result, trade, industry, and the population burgeoned,

97 Williamstown was named, “to honour the ruling King” (Bell 1965: 16), King William IV (1765-1837).
over one hundred thousand people came from England, tens of thousands from Ireland, Scotland and China; thousands from Wales, France, Germany and the United States of America; hundreds from Italy, Spain, Poland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden (Bell 1965: 67).

The influx of people from other nations brought with it a plethora of flags proclaiming distinction, ownership and affiliation. At the gold diggings, flags were used to signpost government offices and stores. For example, in Ballarat, the doctor’s flag was yellow and embellished with a mortar and pestle. Coffee shops, lemonade stalls and the barber all had their own flags. The undertaker’s flag was black. Alongside these, and scattered over the landscape, were the flags and banners of the international miners (Kieza 2014; see also Fox 1973). Flags signified distinction from ‘others’, emblems of difference that heralded the new age and erased the old. McCrae skilfully navigated this environment of rapid change which sought to relegate Aboriginal people to the margins.

In the early 1860s, McCrae established himself and his extended family on an eight acre unsupervised reservation at Lake Moodemere. The family generated an income by selling Murray River cod, local produce, and decorative artefacts (Sayers 1994; Carroll 2014). It was at Lake Moodemere that McCrae made most of his drawings. McCrae was commissioned to draw by white settlers and he produced prolific amounts of work. By white standards, McCrae was a symbol of assimilatory success; he was a hard worker and a teetotaller who owned a horse and cart (Sayers 1994; Carroll 2014). Despite achieving a level of economic independence, McCrae could not escape the exigencies of official race policies. In 1885 the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines refused a request from McCrae and two other men who asked for tents or a house that could be used as shelter from the cold winter (Sayers 1994), and in subsequent years regulations stipulated the forced removal of Aboriginal children from parents who were deemed unable to care for them. Over a period of six years, all four of
McCrae’s children were forcibly taken and sent to various reserves in Victoria. This had a devastating effect on McCrae and his final years were deeply troubled as he strove, yet failed to reunite his family and reclaim his independence from colonial forces (Cooper and Urry 1981). It was during this time in his life that McCrae drew *Corroboree*.

Figure 7: Tommy McCrae (c1890) *Corroboree*, ink on paper (University of Melbourne Archives [UMA] 2016).

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98 Alexander McCrae was Burnum Burnum’s maternal grandfather (Norst 1999).
A Reading of McCrae’s *Corroboree*

Carroll argues that “McCrae’s artwork must be read within the contemporaneous context of the racialized laws that were changing Aboriginal ways of life” (2014: 218). Caruana asserts that the interpretation of Aboriginal images is “not a one-to-one equivalence. Rather, like poetry with all its inherent complexities, multiple references and intended ambiguities, each symbol or icon within a work may encapsulate a variety of meanings” (2012: 14). Therefore, as with any textual reading, the symbolic infusion of *Corroboree* offers various meanings to its audience, past and present, and will be understood according to their levels of knowledge pertaining to Aboriginal culture and Australia’s colonial history. Following this, my reading of *Corroboree*, which features the three quintessential symbols of colonisation – the ship, the white man and the flag – is therefore influenced by the date of its production, the historical backdrop and McCrae’s lived experience.

Adolphus Elkin states that the performance of European themed corroborees can be understood as “a protest against, or an attitude of casualness towards, the people who usurped their country” (1966: 289). During McCrae’s lifetime traditional dances and ceremonies such as the corroboree were forbidden by white authorities. McCrae resisted, or following Elkin, “protested against” this attack on his culture through his artwork and the corroboree became a significant and recurring theme. Using ink and paper McCrae was able to record the cultural rituals of his people, and in doing so, he captured many of the old customs, including the patterns on the bodies of his corroboree dancers. He portrayed groups of corroboree dancers in different ways. For example, the ‘Echuca tribe’ dancers carry either playing-sticks or short

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99 The extinguishment of Aboriginal traditions and cultural practices were played out at on both the local and continental scale. Daisy Bates provides details of two dances “the Wanji-Wanji and the Molong-go” which “took one or two generations to traverse the continent … these great traditional dances demand a large number of performers and audience, and for lack of them, petered out” (1944: 125). Dispossession, genocide and enforced re-location, when combined with the Christian principles of white governance are directly attributable to the demise of these ancient, traditional ceremonies.
spears, whereas the Lachlan area dancers are featured with small feathered head-dresses. Of particular interest McCrae always portrays the ‘Melbourne tribe’ carrying “small flag-like decorated sticks” (Sayers 1994: 33; see also Morphy 2004; Carroll 2014). In Corroboree the dancers carry flags atop sticks, which indicates that they are members of the ‘Melbourne tribe’ or the Wathaurong people, who had previously adopted William Buckley, and from whom Batman, using Buckley as interpreter, stole vast tracts of land. This leads me to hypothesise that the duplicity of Batman’s treaty was in fact heightened by the realisation that a corroboree had been performed in the spirit of ‘friendship’, to which Buckley was privy.

Buckley is the white man featured in McCrae’s illustration, and like the corroboree, he presents as a recurring subject for McCrae. The symbolic importance of Buckley can be understood as multi-faceted. Buckley represents three seismic events which impacted McCrae and his people. First, in 1803 Buckley was one of the first white men to land at Port Philip. Second, through his rejection of white society Buckley became assimilated and welcomed into the local Aboriginal clan. Third, in 1835 Buckley re-entered white society and acting as an interpreter, played an active role and was present at the 1835 signing of Batman’s treaty. Buckley is portrayed in McCrae’s image with little facial hair; his face and expression are clearly visible. McCrae’s depiction of Buckley stands in sharp contrast to European accounts which mythologised Buckley as the ‘wild white man’ who on his re-entry into British civilisation, “was dressed in animal skins, his hair and beard spread ‘as large as a bushel’” (Levell 2008: 227). McCrae also depicts Buckley as part of the clan, initiated and assimilated into the rites and cultural practices of those who have adopted him, “a body fully painted with

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100 On one occasion during his time with the Wathaurong people, Buckley states “I saw some natives coming along, one of them carrying a flag over his shoulders” (qtd. in Morgan 1967: 79). Buckley recalls how the local people had encountered an unmanned vessel in the bay and were attracted to the flag because of its colours. They hauled it down and also took several other things which “would prove serviceable”, when the crew returned to find their flag and other items missing, “they fired off their pieces, but they were at too great a distance to do any injury to the natives” (qtd. in Morgan 1967: 79).
clan designs and otherwise adorned in the manner appropriate for an Aboriginal corroboree, the European hat heightens the dignity of Buckley and the ceremony” (Carroll 2014: 239). At first glance the image suggests that flag-waving and friendship are a mutually satisfying cultural experience. However, on closer scrutiny, while McCrae locates Buckley as part of the dancers, there is clearly a disconnection. Buckley, the white man, is set apart from the main group of dancers, whose legs converge in unison. McCrae’s perspective is powerful, he resists colonial authority by reversing assimilation practices and ascribes power to Aboriginal people and their cultural traditions, thereby nominating white ‘visitors’ as guests to be included, or not, at the behest of local clans.

I cannot ascertain if the Corroboree ship is the Calcutta or the Rebecca. However, both vessels are significant. The former transported Buckley to Port Phillip in 1803, and the latter carried Batman to Port Phillip in 1835. There can be little doubt that the boat, as both the transporter and supplier of white people to Aboriginal land is a symbol of irrevocable change. Boats are a recurring and prominent feature of McCrae’s work. Carroll notes a century later that it is the image of the boat which has warped the paper, “[H]e crosshatched them so heavily that the ink soaked through and tore the paper” (Carroll 2014: 250). The significance of the boat for McCrae is profound. Comparable, Carroll asserts “to the emphasis of a totemic animal or place. The totemic animal in Aboriginal society was one with which each person was associated … their whole life” (2014: 250). Seen in this light the boat in Corroboree can be read as an on-going site of tension, a symbol which signifies life-long and cataclysmic change for McCrae and his people.

Traditionally the corroboree dancers would have carried leek-leek or lyrebird feathers (Carroll 2014), yet in Corroboree McCrae depicts the dancers holding flags that replicate the flags seen on the ship. Carroll notes that here McCrae “is seen to camouflage the symbols of national ceremony to suit both societies in which he operated” (2014: 240). In other words,
while this image might satisfy a colonial audience, it may also transmit a less discernible cypher. Elkin argues that in “songs of contact” (European themed corroborees) Aboriginal people use “the contact situation and European articles for their own personal and social ends, almost as though white men as such did not exist” (1966: 290). Following this I note how the Corroboree flags are seamlessly absorbed into the text as if their integration diffuses their representational force. Viewed in this way, Corroboree can be seen as a re-imagining of the cultural scene where white Australia, through the re-appropriation of its insignia, is ‘assimilated’ into McCrae’s tribal world, just as Buckley had been for so many years.

However, if we consider Corroboree in the context of its production date, it becomes evident that for McCrae c.1890, there could have been little doubt as to the violent and self-interested objectives of the ‘boat people’ who stridently marked the landscape with a performative insignia which ‘announced’, ‘claimed’ and ‘declared’ their intentions which were underpinned by “sanctions such as legal frameworks and normative values” (Coleman 2005: 71). While the depiction can be read in multifarious ways it seems reasonable to assume that the arrival of sailing ships and the insignia of pieces of cloth, – flags – which came to represent the myth of terra nullius and the sovereign claim to Aboriginal land, played a significant role in how McCrae told his stories through his artwork.

**Corroboree: An Enduring Legacy**

For the descendants of McCrae’s “Melbourne tribe”, the Wathaurong people, the repercussions of past colonial practices resulted in an extensive, but not a total loss of language. Certain words have survived; the Wathaurong language lives on,
[P]re-school children can sing basic rhymes, adults wear the words on their chest and walk down Moorabool Street with the pride that they alone of all the thousands who walk it know what Moorabool means\textsuperscript{101} (Pascoe 2007: 191).

Likewise, \textit{Corroboree} has survived. Since the 1960s \textit{Corroboree} has been stored in the UMA. Described as a living cultural memory, the artwork \textit{Corroboree} “connects many lives, past and present and by tracing objects through provenance new perspectives can be found and complex narratives reinterpreted” (UMA 2016). \textit{Corroboree} has been transformed, it has been fused into the exterior of the University of Melbourne’s new Arts West building.\textsuperscript{102} From an “archival object” \textit{Corroboree} has become, “a monumental work of public art” inscribing “a powerful indigenous perspective on Australian history into the building’s skin” (UMA 2016). \textit{Corroboree} is replete with contemporary relevance. \textit{Corroboree} provokes questions which speak of place and identity, of nation and belonging, of land and acquisition, and, in the twenty first century, of the flags which continue to speak for, and represent the Australian nation.

\textbf{Twentieth Century Resistance}\textsuperscript{103}

McCrae died in 1901, the year of federation, when the ‘modern’ Australian nation was born and the Australian red and blue ensigns were officially endorsed. As noted, preparations leading up to federation had taken ten years and were racially motivated as Aboriginal people were systemically excluded from this nation-building project. During the early years of the twentieth century African-American political activism gained momentum and Marcus Garvey became a source of influence for many, including Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. Garvey

\textsuperscript{101} In Wathaurong language, “Moorabool” means mussel, for this and further examples, see Pascoe (2007: 259-260).
\textsuperscript{102} See Arts West façade Reveal Video @ \url{https://arts-west.arts.unimelb.edu.au/arts-west-exterior/arts-west-facade-competition} (University of Melbourne 2016).
\textsuperscript{103} Some of this work comes from my paper, “Flagging Australia: Claims and Identity”, to be published as part of the Proceedings of the 26\textsuperscript{th} International Congress of Vexillology.
was also an important figure for Aboriginal political activism during the twentieth century (Maynard 2007) and he clearly understood the potency of national flags,

[T]hat we suffer so much today under whatsoever flag we live is proof positive that constitutions and laws, when framed by the early advocates of human liberty, never included and were never intended for us as a people (Garvey qtd. in AfricaTown/CD 2014).

In 1917 Garvey founded the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). By the mid-1920s the UNIA had established chapters in 41 countries, including Australia. In 1920 the UNIA held its first international convention in New York’s Maddison Square Garden. Over 25,000 members attended, including a contingent from Australia (Maynard 2007; see also Crampton 1989b). It was at this convention, 13 August 1920 that the Pan-African flag, a tricolour consisting of three equal horizontal bands of red, black and green was formally adopted. The flag was created in response to an American popular song of ridicule written in 1900 called, “Every Race has a Flag but the Coon” (UNIA-ACL 2015). While this was not the only racist song of its kind, it drew attention to an absence to which Garvey responded,

[S]how me the race or the nation without a flag, and I will show you a race of people without any pride. Aye! In song and mimicry they have said, “Every race has a flag but the coon” How true! Aye! But that was said of us four years ago. They can’t say it now (qtd. in UNIA-ACL 2015).

The colours of the Pan African flag denote: red for the blood that unites all people of Black African ancestry and is shed for liberation, black for the people whose existence as a nation, though not a nation-state, is affirmed by the existence of the flag, and green for the abundant natural wealth of Africa (UNIA-ACL 2015).

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104 The Pan-African Flag is also known as the UNIA Flag, the Marcus Garvey Flag, the Universal African Flag, the International African Flag, the Black Liberation Flag, the Black Nationalist, African Nationalist, or the New Afrikan Liberation Flag (UNIA-ACL 2015).

105 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viMTYG4woUk (Roseborough 2011).
In Australia Fred Maynard became increasingly aware of international Black organisations and philosophies while working on the Sydney waterfront. In 1924, as Aboriginal political activism intensified, Maynard and fellow activist Tom Lacy founded the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA). Faith Bandler and Len Fox note, “[N]ow they began to fight in a new way, using the white man’s weapons of organisation, of protest, of pressure, of politics” (1983: 48). John Maynard states that many people consider the 1960s as marking the beginnings of Black political consciousness in Australia. However, he argues, the AAPA is, “rightfully recognised as the precursor of the Aboriginal political movement” (2007: 2; see also Plater 1994). The AAPA ceased in 1928, but was re-established by 26 January 1938 with Jack Patten as spokesperson. The AAPA formed a coalition with the Australian Aboriginal League (AAL), under William Cooper and the Aboriginal Progressive Association (APA), led by William Ferguson and Pearl Gibbs, to protest about the white sesquicentenary celebrations and organise a Day of Mourning which read in part,

this being the 150th Anniversary of the whiteman’s seizure of our country [we] hereby make protest against the callous treatment of our people by the whiteman during the past 150 years, and we appeal to the Australian Nation of today to make new laws for the education and care of Aborigines, and we ask for a new policy which will raise our people to full Citizenship status and equality within the community (qtd. in Hocking 2007: 189).106

As the 1938 calls for equality and citizenship rights were officially ignored, Aboriginal people were being discursively marked as a “dying race” (Ziegler 1938: Chapter 1:1). Ziegler writes,

[T]he present-day situation of this ancient race is forlorn indeed. According to the observations of an eminent authority, it is on the highroad to extinction and is gradually dying out from physical and psychological maladjustment to the changes brought about by contact with us (1938: Chapter 1:16).

106 In contrast to this the Minister-in-Charge of Celebrations, John Dunningham declared the 150th Anniversary to be a source of pride and achievement from which the “discoveries” of James Cook and, “the colonising genius of the British race a new nation was able to come into existence” (Australia’s 150th Anniversary Celebrations Council 1938: 1).
In 1938, the Australian nation was underpinned by harsh assimilatory policies and practices, yet momentum was gathering that would be felt in Aboriginal communities across the land, “[W]hat Bill Ferguson and Bill Cooper and their comrades had started was something that cannot be stopped” (Bandler and Fox 1983: 60).

As the American Black Panther movement ascended in the 1960s both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King were assassinated. In Australia, Aboriginal activists made their call for “Black Power”. This was “a policy of self-assertion, of self-identity… which is trying to encourage black culture – the re-learning, the re-instatting of black culture wherever it is possible” (Coe 1975: 105). Black Power, “is where our people come together united, fighting for survival” (Anderson 1975:19). Resistance to colonial rule during the 1960s was made public through various protests. Precursors to the Black Power movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s include the 1965 Freedom Ride and the 1966 Wave Hill walk-off. These events laid the foundations for the emergence of more strident forms of political activism.

The Freedom Ride

In New South Wales a civil rights protest led by Charles Perkins highlighted racial discrimination in the state’s western country towns. Perkins was born in the era of the ‘protection’ and subjected to the assimilatory practices of colonial rule. He challenged these systems of power and through his responses became an influential voice of resistance, “[T]he more the whites criticized Aborigines, the more I was determined to learn, and so fight them and answer their irrational criticism” (Perkins 1975: 70). In 1966 he became the first Indigenous male to graduate from university. Perkins entered bureaucratic life in 1969 and worked for the Commonwealth Office of Aboriginal Affairs. In 1981 he became the first Indigenous person to head the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. He went on to chair of
Arremte Council of Central Australia and was elected deputy chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in 1993.

In 1965 Perkins led a group of Sydney University students on a political protest known as the Freedom Ride. The Freedom Riders demanded equality for Aboriginal people and they protested about the utility of public space by drawing attention to the systemic nature of racism in regional New South Wales. The Freedom Riders travelled to Walgett, a town where racial discrimination was endemic. For example, in 1964 two young Aboriginal boys, aged nine, were incarcerated in a prison cell for two days and nights as punishment for taking two table tennis bats, balls and some crayons from the Anglican Church. The Anglican minister showed no compassion and laid all blame with members of the Aboriginal community (Curthoys 2011). Others however were outraged, including several unions. The result was widespread publicity and a written report which,

went far beyond the gaoling incident. It described the tin shanties, and reported first-hand accounts of the brutality and sadism of one particular policeman … the delegation learnt of the exclusion from the RSL Club of returned Aboriginal Diggers (except sometimes on Anzac Day) and the sign ‘Aboriginals by inveration [sic] only’ at the Oasis Hotel-Motel (Curthoys 2011: 14).

Interviews and surveys conducted by the Freedom Riders found that Aboriginal people could not purchase blocks of land, had to wait for the doctor to treat white patients before being seen, and were excluded from the clothes shop, the cinema, and the Oasis lounge and RSL. Ann Curthoys explains “wherever we went, the story of racial discrimination was the same” (2011: 17). The activists protested outside the Walgett RSL for seven hours, the ensuing confrontations and debates had an indelible effect, not only on the township, but also upon many of the young people present, Michael Anderson for example, witnessed the student protest first-hand (see Perkins 1975: Chapter 8). The Freedom Riders went on to protest in Moree as Aboriginal people were not allowed to enter Council chambers or use the toilets.
Adults were refused entry into local swimming pool and Aboriginal children’s access was strictly regulated (Perkins 1975). The Freedom Riders’ demonstration against racism in the country towns of NSW was an effective strategy of resistance that attracted national and international media attention. The publicity “shocked and embarrassed white Australia, especially in the cities, and contributed to the overwhelming YES vote in the 1967 referendum” (Parbury 2005: 117 emphasis in the original).

**The Wave Hill Walk-Off**

On 23 August 1966 Vincent Lingiari, a stockman and traditional owner, led 200 Gurindji stockmen, domestic workers and their families off the Wave Hill pastoral station. According to Nici Cumpston this was, “an unprecedented act of resistance and self-determination”, a precursor which “marked the beginning of the national land rights movement” (2017: 46). The Gurindji protest was a land claim that demanded better pay, treatment, and working conditions from the owner of the pastoral station, an English aristocrat, Lord Vestey. The strike lasted nine years. Initially the workers camped in the bed of the Victoria River before moving on to their traditional lands at Daguragu or Wattie Creek in April 1967. Minoru Hokari argues that the Gurindji walk-off was an act of decolonisation that sought to “physically leave European authority, to regain autonomy and sovereignty over their country, to establish their own community, and to run the cattle station by and for themselves” (2000: 113).

In 1967 the Governor-General, another British aristocrat, Lord Casey, refused to grant a lease of 1300 square kilometres around Daguragu to the Gurindji. The Gurindji argued,

> [O]ur people have lived here from time immemorial and our culture, myths, dreaming and sacred places have evolved in this land. Many of our forefathers were killed in the early days while trying to retain it. Therefore we feel that morally the land is ours and should be returned to us (National Museum of Australia [NMA] 2014).
In 1972 the Whitlam Labor government (1972-1975) came into power pledging to legislate for Aboriginal land rights. The original Wave Hill lease was relinquished and two new leases were issued, one to the Vesteys and one to the Gurindji. The Gurindji lease encompassed some 3300 square kilometres (NMA 2014). On 16 August 1975 Prime Minister Gough Whitlam went to Daguragulu and in a powerful and now renowned gesture, poured a handful of soil into Vincent Lingiari’s hand\(^\text{107}\) stating,

Vincent Lingiari, I solemnly hand to you these deeds as proof in Australian law that these lands belong to the Gurindji people, and I put into your hands part of the earth as a sign that this land will be the possession of you and your children forever (NMA 2014).

\(^{107}\) Nigel Parbury claims that “[T]his symbolic action was in imitation of the gesture by the Dutigalla [one of many spellings of the Aboriginal word “tribe”] at Port Phillip in 1835 when they made the treaty with John Batman” (2005: 116).
This occasion marked the first time that the Commonwealth Government had recognised Aboriginal Law or ceded land to the sovereign owners.

Concerted campaigns of protest and public awareness driven by Aboriginal activists during the 1960s highlighted the need for change at every level of Australian society. On 27 May 1967 the Australian people were asked to accept a referendum, “to repeal the discriminatory provisions of the Commonwealth Constitution by counting Aboriginal people in the census and allowing the Commonwealth to pass laws for Aboriginal people” (Parbury 1999: 121). The referendum was supported by ninety-one per cent of the population and the two discriminatory clauses which had adversely affected Aboriginal people since 1901 were removed. Gordon Briscoe expected the referendum,

would wipe away the injustices of the past 200 years of coercion, suppression and humiliation and establish a way of life for Aborigines that would bring the peace we are entitled to as human beings (2014a: 172).

Despite the positive result of the referendum little change occurred. Behrendt claims that this was due to the systemic failure of official structures and institutions to implement change or any form of equality which would ease the harmful impacts of colonial policies and practice. Behrendt also observes that the refusal to implement structural change is fortified by those “who embrace the Australian identity only in its colonial manifestation” (2003: 4). The rejection of an ‘exclusive’ colonial-Australian-identity by Indigenous people is an enduring assertion of resistance which has been etched into the landscape since first contact. Tanya Hosch states “[T]hese fearless leaders and dear friends … remind us we are all part of a continuum of history, of struggle and reform, of small steps and big leaps” (2016: 26).
Symbols of Identity and Resistance

Since first contact, each stage of opposition and political agitation came with demands for change, recognition and social equity which bolstered and propelled the next, culminating in two of the most significant Aboriginal symbols of identity and resistance. The first, discussed in detail below, was the Aboriginal flag created in 1971 whose colours of black, yellow and red have since become central to Aboriginal identity. To show or wear the Aboriginal colours is a performative act of resistance which is daily replicated through “the public display of the Aboriginal flag and colours on Indigenous bodies and on buildings in cities, country towns and remote communities” (Moreton-Robinson 2008b: 127). Flying the flag or wearing its colours is an effective way of conveying solidarity, belonging, and pride. Jim Everett writes,

Red, black and yellow are the colours of our band,
Black is for the people of this Southern land.
Yellow is for the mighty sun life giver in the sky,
And red is for our people’s blood so onward we survive

The second symbol to assert Aboriginal sovereignty, land rights, culture and identity was the Aboriginal Tent Embassy which was founded in 1972,

[W]ith its flags fluttering proudly in the breeze, the Aboriginal Embassy on the lawns opposite the Federal Parliament has been one of the most successful press and parliamentary lobbies in Australian political history (Newfong 2014: 139).

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108 Archie Moore argues, “[T]he current Aboriginal Flag is a pan-Aboriginal flag. Aboriginal people may not feel represented by this flag – given that it is a united Aboriginal nations flag” (2015: 122). This is a valid point but the intention here is far from seeking to homogenise. My critique involves an exploration into the history of the Aboriginal flag and its applications as a symbol of resistance, pride and identity.
The Aboriginal Tent Embassy

The Aboriginal Embassy began life as a beach umbrella, and has since become the longest running protest site in Australia (Gilbert 2000). The Aboriginal Embassy was established on the lawns opposite Parliament House, Canberra in 1972 in response to William McMahon’s Prime Ministerial Australia Day address. McMahon stated that his Coalition government would neither give, nor recognise land rights for Aboriginal people. He argued that land rights would “threaten the security of tenure of every Australian” (qtd. in Parbury 2005: 119). McMahon’s comments spoke to the anxiety of the wider population and implied that white Australians might lose ‘their’ land to Aboriginal people. The historical and ongoing theft and control of Indigenous lands underpins the affluence of white Australia. Land is the fundamental source of inherited wealth from which white Australians have reaped the benefits.

In a direct protest to McMahon’s address, a group of young Black Power activists left Sydney on 25 January 1972. They drove through the night and arrived in Canberra in the early morning where they planted a beach umbrella on the lawns facing Parliament House. Kathy Lothian argues that “the rejection of ‘whiteness’ as ‘rightness’ was the foundational politics for many Black Power activists” (2007: 23). In an explicit rejection of McMahon’s stance the activists put up a sign which identified the area as the “Aboriginal Embassy”. Scott Robinson (1994) states that the Embassy was a multi-faceted display of symbolism. Canberra is home to many embassies that exude wealth, privilege and diplomatic immunity. In contrast, the Aboriginal Embassy signified the status of Aboriginal people as sovereign owners of the land to whom wealth and legal recognition is denied, “[T]o some it represented traditional Aboriginal life and to others the degraded town and station camps, and it directly expressed

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109 Michael Anderson, Billie Craigie, Bert Williams and Tony Coorey.
solidarity with the Gurindji people camped at Wattie Creek”\(^{10}\) (Garner 2013: 250). The beach umbrella Embassy soon transformed into a community of tents and was a site which also served to reunite Aboriginal people. Colonial rule ensured the movements and daily practices of Aboriginal people had been strictly regulated, “[U]nder the old pass-laws we didn’t have opportunities to be visiting people in other reserves and other states. We really didn’t know each other” (Sykes 1989: 94). The Aboriginal Tent Embassy became a physical site of reconnection and unity, where political activism was expressed and enacted, “the camp provided a unifying focus. A camp with a flag … was a challenge to white sovereignty” (Garner 2013: 248).

Figure 9: The Aboriginal Tent Embassy flying the Pan-African colours and the Tjuringa flag (Image: Foley n.d).

\(^{10}\) And vice versa. On 22 February 1972, two representatives of the Gurindji, who had been campaigning for land rights for six years, were invited to speak at a rally held at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy (Foley 2014b: 36).
Initially two flags were raised at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy,

[T]he first flag that flew on the tents was a black, green and red pennant which was the flag developed fifty years earlier by Marcus Garvey as the symbol of his international black consciousness movement (Foley 2014b: 30).

This flag was hand stitched by Michael Anderson. In a show of international unity Anderson replicated the colours of the Pan-African flag. The colours were inverted as “Anderson had never seen the actual flag but was only remembering what … had [been] described to him” (Maynard 2014b: 94). The first flag flown at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was a strategic signal that explicitly connected the Aboriginal struggle for justice to the broader international civil rights movement. In April a second flag, known as the Tjuringa flag joined the first, “comprising a spear laid across a red [ochre] and black background with four crescents looking inward to symbolize the black rights struggle from the four corners of Australia” (Foley 2014b: 30).

Several months of peaceful protest passed as support for the Embassy grew both throughout Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. In July 1972, the situation changed for two reasons. First, it was sometime during this month that the Aboriginal flag made its arrival at the Embassy.

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111 As told to me in conversation with Michael Anderson, Lightning Ridge, Monday 2 December 2013. See also Maynard (2014b).
Second, on 20 July, following the introduction of the Trespass on Commonwealth Lands Ordinance (1972) 150 police entered the camp and tore down the Embassy tents. Violent clashes ensued and eight protestors were arrested. On 23 July, 200 activists tried to re-establish the Embassy. They were confronted by 360 police in what Foley describes as “one of the most violent confrontations in the history of Canberra” (qtd. in Robinson 1994: 58). Finally, on 30 July, as busloads of supporters from across the continent arrived, the Tent Embassy was re-assembled. 2000 people marched to Parliament House and in a remarkable show of resistance and solidarity the peaceful protestors handed a note to police giving them permission to dismantle the tent (Robinson 1994; Dow 2000). This was a strategic strike at colonial authority. By granting permission for the tent’s removal, Aboriginal people reclaimed authority over a
site that had been, according to the newly instituted ordinance, illegally occupied. Sykes recalls this event,

[We stood back and watched while they removed the pegs and uprights, rolled the canvas up and walked away. Quite a few of us were still there, and we whipped out another sheet of canvas and held it aloft with our hands. The tent, we felt, was not what was important, it was the symbolism of what it represented. A piece of ragged canvas held high by many hands still has the power to evoke that symbol of our destitution and living conditions, even today (1998: 192).

The presence of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy had been a constant source of embarrassment for the McMahon government and even though authorities had physically removed it, the spirit of resistance that the Embassy produced endured (Gilbert 2014). On its twentieth anniversary, 26 January 1992, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was permanently re-established on the lawns opposite the now ‘old’ Parliament House. In 1995, the site was registered by the Australian Heritage Commission (Dow 2000). Briscoe claims the Aboriginal Tent Embassy became the “human face” of Aboriginal political consciousness which “transformed any previous symbol into a national one that a series of flags personified. In my view”, Briscoe asserts, “the flag was an emergent property that presented the lasting elements of an Aboriginal response with its origin in 1901” (2014b: 53).
The Aboriginal Flag

Figure 11: The Aboriginal Flag (Flags Australia 2016).

In 1971, Harold Thomas, a Luritja man from central Australia created the Aboriginal flag. The flag is sometimes referred to as the Thomas flag, the Adelaide flag, (as it was designed and first presented in Adelaide), or the Third flag, as it was the third flag to be flown at the Embassy (Burton 2007). I can identify three events from 1970, which, when combined, resulted in the production of the Aboriginal flag. In 1970 Thomas wrote to the then Prime Minister, John Gorton, and enquired why no Aboriginal people were employed at the South Australian Art Gallery or Museum. Shortly afterwards Thomas was offered a job as a survey artist at the Museum. In 1970, Thomas also met with Gary Foley and together they discussed how to “encourage their fellow Aboriginals to ‘join the cause’” (Thomas qtd. in ATSIC 1991: 8). Furthermore, in 1970 at a Land Rights protest march in Adelaide, Thomas made a significant discovery. He noted that, “white sympathisers at the back marched with their assorted flags and banners while there was none of equal impact – indeed, none at all – to lead the Aboriginal people in front” (Burton 2007: 39). Thomas asserts that “twenty people with a flag could seem to outnumber a larger group of people without a flag” (qtd. in Kelly 2009: 37). Thomas and
Foley decided that a flag would effectively express Aboriginal people’s demands for land rights (ATSIC 1991).

Thomas worked to reduce several colours on the original design to just three: “black, symbolising Aboriginal people; red, the mother earth, as well as ochre, which is used in ceremonies; and the yellow sun, the constant giver and renewer of life” (ATSIC 1991: 8). In order to represent Aboriginal people the colour black had to be used because, Thomas states, “we were talking in terms of … black consciousness, black awareness, black power, be proud of your blackness” (Harold Joseph Thomas v David George Brown & James Morrison Vallely Tennant 1997: 8; see also Kwan 2006). In this post-referendum era, as a result of assimilatory practices many people did not freely identify as Aboriginal. Thomas argued that a flag would help unite Aboriginal people and provide as a symbol for cultural identity. Thomas stresses that black was always intended to be on top of his flag, “the blacks under the red ground would have symbolised their death. The black was on top to react against the common view, it had shock value, it creates a tension” (Thomas qtd. in Kelly 2009: 44). Thomas regarded red and black as colours of aggression that contrasted with the blue of the Australian flag. Thomas created his flag to provide a unifying national symbol of identity for Aboriginal people (ATSIC 1991). The Aboriginal flag and its colours evolved to become a multi-faceted symbol of political resistance, of survival, pride and the affirmation of cultural identity, “[T]he flag was not a racist flag for Aborigines, but a flag for the Aboriginal people of Australia” (Thomas qtd. in Kelly 2009: 37).

The Aboriginal flag was first flown at Victoria Square, Adelaide on National Aboriginal Day 12 July 1971. A year later, Foley introduced the flag to the Tent Embassy in Canberra where it was adopted on a national scale. The fate of the original Aboriginal flag remains unknown. Described as, “one of our most powerful national symbols, the whereabouts of the original – a national treasure if it still exists – remains a mystery” (Williams 2013). Thomas
seeks to locate it and see it housed in the National Museum of Australia. During my research, I came across a black and white photograph of an Aboriginal flag.

Figure 12: This photograph in *The Advertiser*, 14 July 1972, shows a square Aboriginal flag with a large central disk and Colin MacDonald (Image: Gale and Brookman 1975: 112).

Figure 13: Photograph detail.

From the above photograph it is evident that this Aboriginal flag differs considerably from its present version. Square in shape, it contrasts with European rectangular-shaped flags, which became dominant as a result of colonialism (Neumann 2007; Knowlton 2017). The upper third
of the flag is dark and the lower two thirds lighter. This is different to the flag of today which is divided horizontally in two equal halves. The flag in the photograph carries a large central disk. I note that on the tree there is an “ABORIGINAL EMBASSY” poster with an image of a flag that appears also to feature similar proportions to that of the material flag. Shortly after viewing the photograph I read an article by Tony Burton (2007) in the Journal of Flags Australia, *Crux Australis*, titled: ‘Tjuringa Dreaming: Revolutionary Flags of the Australian Aboriginals-Heralds of Change 1971-1997’. One section of the article is called: ‘An Adelaide Mystery’.

Burton states that a piece of the Thomas flag had been deposited at the Museum of South Australia in 1991. Prior to his visit to the museum to investigate the offcut in 1995, Burton notes, vexillologists had presumed that the original Adelaide flag looked as it does today: a flag equally divided into black and red halves with a central yellow disk. Burton claims that the offcut, photographed below, is indicative of how the original flag actually looked.

![Figure 14: Details of the offcut (Burton 2007: 36).](image)
When I compared the 1972 black and white photograph of the ‘square’ Aboriginal flag with the photographs of the circular black and red offcut in *Crux Australis* I noted a striking similarity. I forwarded a copy of the photograph to Burton (FSA) and he agreed that “the pattern of the flag in North Adelaide seems to match the offcuts in the SA Museum” (2012 pers. comm., 17 September). Burton furthered the investigation and contacted Thomas, who identified the man in the photograph as Colin MacDonald and “confirmed that the flag near the tents with its large disk was a second generation (that is, a copy) of the original that had been displayed in Victoria Square the year before” (2012 pers. comm., 17 September). Burton then provided a number of hypotheses relating to the offcut in South Australia’s Museum.

1. The Museum offcuts are from one of the *replicas*, not the original;
2. They are from the original which itself had the anomaly of unequal segments of the circle;
3. That this was the original design and that replicas copied this anomaly exactly (2012 pers. comm., 17 September emphasis in the original).

In January 2017 I met with Kristin Phillips, Principal Conservator of Textiles, Artlab Australia, working for the South Australian Museum and I viewed the offcut. Phillips, who worked on the Eureka flag restoration project, was interested in the 1972 photograph which she stated gave her an idea as to why the proportions of the museum offcut were asymmetric. Phillips noted a correlation between the photograph and the museum’s offcut and she commented that the Tjuringa flag is also square, suggesting that perhaps its shape might have been influenced by the shape of the square Aboriginal flag. (2017 pers. comm., 15 June).

Coral Dow’s chronology of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, formatted under three headings: Milestones, Details and Source Documents, makes mention of the Adelaide Tent Embassy flag:
- Milestones: 13 July

- Details: An embassy established in Adelaide (following a consulate in Perth). The Adelaide embassy flew the red, black and yellow Aboriginal flag designed by Harold Thomas and first flown in Adelaide in 1971


Finally I note that mention was also made of this flag during a 1997 court case which was triggered by the Aboriginal flag’s gazetted (see below). In 1995 the Aboriginal flag was assimilated into Australia’s flag hierarchy through its gazetted, and it became an official flag of the Australian nation. Following the proclamation Thomas sought to assert his ownership of copyright as the flag’s designer. He was angry with the Commonwealth which, among other things, he claimed sought to reproduce the flag without his permission in the 1995 Commonwealth of Australia book, *Australian Flags* (*Thomas v Brown* 1997: 3). During the court hearing Justice Sheppard examined the offcut held by the South Australian Museum. He noted “that the circle was divided between the black and the red sections of the material unevenly. There was more red material than black material” (qtd. in *Thomas v Brown* 1997: 6). Sheppard also drew attention to a photograph taken at a protest rally in March 1972,

> I looked at the photograph said to be of the group taken after the Brutality March in which Mr [Colin] MacDonald is holding the flag, I observed that the flag he was holding seemed to have more material that was red than material which was black (qtd. in *Thomas v Brown* 1997: 45).

Sheppard noted the similarities between the offcut and March 1972 photograph but did not consider it appropriate to pursue the anomaly in court any further. On 9 April 1997 the Federal Court concluded:
1. It be declared that:

(a) Harold Joseph Thomas is the author of the artistic work being the design for the flag described in Schedule 1 to the proclamation dated 27 June 1995 under s.5 of the Flags Act 1953 and published in the Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No. S259 of 14 July 1995, such flag being known as “the Aboriginal flag” (“the artistic work”); and

(b) Harold Joseph Thomas is the owner of the copyright subsisting in the said artistic work (Thomas v Brown 1997: 2).

The Aboriginal flag remains protected under the Copyright Act 1968 and can only be reproduced with Thomas’ permission. The Adelaide “mystery” is not solved. Perhaps filmed or photographic evidence in private collections may be in existence, which, if found, could substantially enrich our understandings of the Aboriginal flag during the early stages of its life.

Further research indicates that the original flag was indeed different to the present flag, in both shape and proportion. Thomas states that his original flag was “squared up” and that “present day flags were too long” (qtd. in Burton 2007: 45; see also Thomas v Brown 1997: 8). The exclusive manufacturers of the Aboriginal flag, Carroll and Richardson, were unable to produce the flag in its original, shorter proportions and convinced Thomas that his flag would look out of place if its specifications differed from those of the national flag (Kelly 2009). Thomas and vexillogist Ralph Kelly agree that the original proportions of the Aboriginal flag, “were more balanced and stronger than the current stretched proportions and the central disk was better in its original larger size” (Kelly 2009: 40). Following this, it could be argued that through its standardisation, the Aboriginal flag has been successfully regulated in that it now defers to colonial specifications. Furthermore through its gazetral, the Aboriginal flag has also been forced into compliance, yet in this instance colonial authority was imposed without Thomas’ consent.
On 14 July 1995 both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags were gazetted by the Federal Government as official flags of Australia. Thomas was critical of this. His flag was meant to serve his people and was not intended to be, as he put it, “a flag of significance to the Australian nation generally … [and] was not a reflection of white people’s flags” (Thomas qtd. in Kelly 2009: 37). Thomas’s complaint was compounded by a lack of governmental consultation,

[T]he Gazettal had no respect for the designer. It didn’t appreciate the integrity of the flag. The Government didn’t understand the facts of the flag and its symbolism. The Government wanted a symbol to show acceptance. It dismissed the struggle of the people for whom the flag is still important (Thomas qtd. in Kelly 2009: 38).

Thomas argued that the representational force of his flag would be diffused if it became an Australian flag (Kwan 2006). Not only was the symbolism of Thomas’ flag under siege but so too was its status. According to the Flags Act 1953 proclaimed flags are subservient to the pre-eminence of the Australian flag.

Opposition Leader, John Howard, was opposed to giving the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags official recognition. He claimed the move “would rightly be seen by many in the community not as an act of reconciliation but as a divisive gesture” and he feared it would “diminish the status of the Australian flag” (qtd. in Kwan 2006: 134). Clark argues that Howard’s vision for the nation, “rests on a construction of unified national identity premised on division” (2006: 55). The status of the “unified” nation’s flag was being compromised and the Opposition was anxious “that the red, black and yellow Aboriginal flag could be flown in place of the Australian flag at official events” (Cole-Adams 1995). Labor Prime Minister at that time, Paul Keating, argued that the official inclusion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags was an “inclusive act” which meant, “[I]t will no longer be a breach of protocol for a young athlete like Cathy Freeman [see below] to carry the Aboriginal flag with pride”
(qtd. in Cole-Adams 1995). Through the premise of “inclusion”, or what Administrative Services Minister, Frank Walker calls “a gesture of reconciliation to Australia’s indigenous peoples” (Cole-Adams 1995), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags were proclaimed as official flags of Australia. The formal recognition of the Aboriginal flag was granted by the Queen’s representative, Governor General, William Hayden. The *Flags Act 1953* Proclamation states that the flag is, “recognised as the flag of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia and a flag of significance to the Australian nation generally” and is, “to be known as the Australian Aboriginal flag” (Commonwealth of Australia 1995: 152). Thomas “bitterly resented the flag being proclaimed in this way … the proclamation represented a usurpation of something which properly belonged to the Aboriginal people” (Sheppard qtd. in *Thomas v Brown* 1997: 11). Despite the flag’s forced assimilation into the Australian nation, the Aboriginal flag spans time and distance and endures as a strident symbol of identity, pride and resistance. The following section explores some of the ways the Aboriginal flag has been employed to reinforce and reinstate Aboriginal identity.

**Flagging Pride and Resistance**

**1988**

On 26 January 1988, white Australia marked 200 years of ‘settlement’ and was in the grip of a national celebration (Norst 1999). Andrew Lattas notes that national celebrations are contrived by the state in order to produce nationalism which he defines as “one of the major currencies the state trades upon for its existence” (1997: 223). In New South Wales alone more than 32,000 Bicentennial events were planned (Jarman 1987). The Australian Bicentennial Authority (ABA), formed by the federal government in 1980, and headed by the serving Prime Minister of the day, was tasked to prepare a programme for the year-long 1988 celebration. The ABA’s objectives were:
To strengthen national pride.

- Involve all Australians.
- Provide useful and lasting souvenirs for future generations.
- Offer educational and cultural programmes into Australia’s past, present and future.
- To have international involvement (White 2004: 31).

The original theme chosen by the ABA for the Bicentennial was ‘Living Together’ (Parbury 2005). The Bicentennial logo was designed by Don Goodwin in 1981. He originally used the Commonwealth colours of blue and golden yellow, however in 1984, the colours were altered to green and deep yellow to reflect the formal adoption of Australia’s national colours (Bartlett 2010).

![The Australian Bicentennial Logo](Flags_Australia_2014)

Figure 15: The Australian Bicentennial Logo (Flags Australia 2014).

The “Australian Bicentennial symbol is a ribbon broadly representing the Australian landmass, and the differing stripes, harmoniously combined, visually express the Bicentennial theme of ‘Living Together’” (Jarman 1987:12), although according to Flags Australia,

[T]he logo for the Bicentennial celebrations was a stylised map of Australia, consisting of a ribbon with stripes of different widths. The ribbon alluded to the diagonal stripes of the Union Jack and the seven golden stripes signified the six states and the territories (2014).
Lattas states that the production of symbolic capital such as flags allows the state to profit “from its investment in the creation and circulation of a culture of nationalism” (1997: 223). ABA Chair, John Armstrong questioned the “Living Together” theme noting the structural inequality of Australian society and the Bicentennial theme was subsequently changed to: ‘Celebration of a Nation’ (Parbury 2005). Two hundred years of white Australia was heralded as a year-long national celebration in the minds of its citizenry. The politics of cultural investment work hard to connect the people to their mythologised version of history. Through this investment “the fiction of a national identity and the mythic space of the nation” is created and so “the state renews and establishes its authority as sovereign” (Lattas 1997: 223-224). The Bicentennial project was an intense campaign in which the story of white Australia was authenticated through ephemera and events underpinned by the narrative of a ‘national celebration’. This narrative was represented by a logo into which the Union Jack, as ever-present overseer, was surreptitiously woven.

Kevin Gilbert & Eleanor Williams state that 1987 was designated as a “Year of Mourning” for Aboriginal people (1996: 59). Resistance to the official Bicentennial celebrations commenced with a demonstration at the War Memorial, Canberra. It was here that the Aboriginal flag, also known as the land rights flag, was laid, as if draping a coffin at the base of the tomb of the Unknown Soldier which displays the sacrosanct words: “Lest We Forget” (Gilbert & Williams 1996: 59 and 82). In Chapter Four I argued that the Australian War Memorial has been eulogised as ‘the soul of the nation’ and I drew attention to the fact that it is a space where Aboriginal people have long been kept on the periphery. The act of draping the Aboriginal land rights flag at the base of the Unknown Soldier could be interpreted as a symbolic gesture of mourning that marks the Unknown Solider as Aboriginal and also draws attention to the battles fought on Aboriginal land during two hundred years of dispossession, and to the on-going reality of exclusion. Smith notes that for military funerals
the national flag becomes a ‘pall’ flag used to drape the casket (1975). In Australia the national flag “may be used to cover the coffin of any deceased Australian citizen … The canton should be draped over the ‘left shoulder’ of the coffin, representing the heart” (Commonwealth of Australia 2010: 21). Even in death the body remains symbolically ‘British’ at heart. Draping the Unknown Soldier with the Aboriginal flag can also be understood as a powerful act of symbolic inversion that challenges the dominance of colonial discourse with a public declaration of Aboriginal sovereignty.

Australian writer Patrick White was disenchanted with the 1988 celebrations. He articulated his disdain by the flying both the Aboriginal and Eureka flags (Norst 1999). These flags are potent, grass-roots symbols of resistance, as a result, they have gained popularity in their own right, “… they were people’s flags. In Australia this has been rare. Flags represent official power” (Kennedy 1998: 20). Kennedy draws attention to the way in which the Australian national flag, and its associates, state flags for example, have been authorised and manipulated as symbols of colonial authority.

Burnum Burnum

In a personal statement of resistance to the Bicentenary, Tommy McCrae’s great grandson, Burnum Burnum made a famous anti-colonial declaration. On 26 January 1988, he planted the Aboriginal flag at Dover and took possession of England. Burnum Burnum was proud to discover who his great-grandfather was “…for Tommy McRae was respected as a notable Aboriginal artist in his own day and is valued even more today” (Norst 1999: 68). Like

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112 The Eureka flag, is also known as the flag of the Southern Cross. It was first flown over the Ballarat Eureka goldfield on 29 November 1854. In response to increasing angst against the government and the exorbitant costs associated with the monthly gold licence fee the diggers gathered around a pole some 24 metres tall from which the giant, four by two and a half metres Eureka flag flew and the diggers swore their allegiance to a flag that was not British. “We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly by each other and fight to defend our rights and liberties” (Kieza 2014: 136). The Eureka flag has a dark blue field and a white symmetric cross in the centre which features five white, eight-pointed stars. Today the Eureka flag has been endorsed and appropriated to suit an array of purposes. For some the Eureka flag is an icon which speaks of unity and popular struggle; for others it is a symbol of right-wing patriotism and division.
his predecessor Burnum Burnum wanted to send a message about the colonial history of Australia. His protest was “[A] bit of theatre-of-the-absurd to show the absurdity of people on the other side of the world claiming a whole continent for themselves” (Norst 1999: 131-132). Burnum Burnum’s was “the Bicentennial event that was to crown them all” (Norst 1999: 130).

Burnum Burnum chose the white cliffs of Dover to make his land claim because it evoked in him a sense of terra nullius; the landscape here presented as ‘empty land’ and lay waiting to be claimed. This was a moment captured in time, as noted by Norst “[T]he image of the Aboriginal hero laying claim to English soil with the Aboriginal flag held proudly aloft expressed ‘more than a thousand words’” (1999: 135). Burnum Burnum ‘invaded’ and took ‘possession’ of England with the Aboriginal flag. His was a “symbolic gesture of defiance [which] played against the pomp and ceremony of the bicentennial celebrations” (Farnsworth

Figure 16: On 26 January 1988 Burnum Burnum used the Aboriginal flag to take possession of England (Image: Kulture Consulting n.d.).
Burnum Burnum’s claim conveyed Aboriginal peoples’ convictions regarding the unlawful occupation of their land. His “‘invasion’ was a publicity triumph. He appeared on television all over the world” (Norst 1999: 132). As Burnum Burnum laid claim to England he delivered an address (see Appendix E). Burnum Burnum’s Declaration and use of the Aboriginal flag questioned the legitimacy of Australia’s claims. Burnum Burnum conveyed to “white Australians and British people the realisation that this occupied land, Australia, was claimed arbitrarily by an alien people without any consultation, let alone treaty or compensation” (Coulter qtd. in Norst 1999: 136). Burnum Burnum’s was a strategic message of resistance to the world. I now turn to some notable athletes who have also employed their flags to send a powerful message of resistance.

**Flags of Culture and Identity**

**Cathy Freeman**

Cathy Freeman is an athlete of international renown. She was born in 1973 and became an Olympian sprinter. Freeman is described by Leanne White as “an iconic sporting and cultural ambassador for her country, [who] has helped influence the way Australians and the rest of the world think about this country and its people” (2008:1). Freeman was shaped by assimilationist policies which deeply affected her family and community. She states that “[A]ll this pain inspires me. I want to be a freedom fighter. I want to break down the stereotype of Aboriginal people as alcoholics and criminals” (Freeman 2003: 79). At the 1994 Commonwealth Games in Canada, Freeman aged 21, won her first gold medal. She ran a victory lap draped in the Aboriginal flag, an image which was broadcast worldwide. Freeman notes she

> took the flag and draped it over my shoulders like a cape and trottled off. I wanted to shout, ‘Look at me, look at my skin. I’m black and I’m the best!’ There was no more shame (2003, 81).
This was an act of agency and pride that resonated globally. Arthur Tunstall, Australian Commonwealth Games chef de mission\(^{113}\) criticised Freeman’s use of the Aboriginal flag. He stated the management “did not want any athlete acknowledging flags other than the Australian flag” (McGregor 2000: 169). In 2012, Tunstall re-stated his case, “[W]e compete under one flag, the Australian flag … They were the rules … I didn’t even know what the Aboriginal flag bloody looked like!” (qtd. in Sygall 2012: 2). In 1994 the Aboriginal flag was 23 years old.

Freeman’s decision to carry the Aboriginal flag generated 5000 letters and faxes of support. A 94 year old Aboriginal woman stated,

I’ve seen all these things happen with stolen children, being moved from our homes, seen cruelty and sadness and when I saw you run around with that flag, for the first time in my life I felt it was worth it all to be an Aborigine (qtd. in Freeman 2003: 87).

Thomas credits Freeman with altering the Aboriginal flag’s capacity for meaning-making, “until Freeman’s triumphant laps in Canada, the flag had rarely been seen as a symbol of victory. Freeman changed its image forever” (Thomas qtd. in Stephens 1994: 1). Six years later, at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, Freeman won Australia’s 100\(^{th}\) Olympic gold medal which was the first individual gold medal won by an Indigenous athlete (White 2008). In a similar symbolic gesture that would again generate significant local and global support Freeman ran her victory lap sporting both the Aboriginal and Australian flags.

\(^{113}\) At an international sports event the person responsible for the national team is referred to as the chef de mission.
It was always a dream of mine to not only win an Olympic gold medal but to do the victory lap with both flags ... I hold the Aboriginal community in such a high place in my heart so I’m very proud of my Indigenous roots (Freeman qtd. in Marlow 2015).

**Damien Hooper**

Damien Hooper is a professional boxer who competed at the London 2012 Olympic Games. Prior to his first match, Hooper sparked contention by wearing a T-Shirt which had the Aboriginal flag printed on its front.
International Olympic Committee (IOC) Rule 50 forbids the use of any paraphernalia which may detract from the sporting focus of the Games. The Olympic charter also states athletes who breach IOC Rule 50 should face disqualification. Following the charter, Hooper had breached IOC rules and he was duly reprimanded. Australia’s chef de mission, Nick Green, stated that Hooper was “very remorseful” and “extremely apologetic”, Green asserts Hooper has “learnt his lesson and he won’t do that again” (Lane & Barrett 2012: 4). The infantilising of Hooper as a ‘naughty child’ who has “learnt his lesson” is a well-worn colonial strategy used to bring into line recalcitrant ‘others’. Hooper, clearly aware of the discursivities of national sporting bodies, responds to the admonition by stating,  

I am an Aboriginal, representing my culture and all my people, and I am very proud ... I was thinking about my family and all that. It made my whole performance better (qtd. in Barlow 2012).
In his response, Hooper undermines Green’s affirmations of his penitence for wrong doing by foregrounding his people as the primary focus of his performance. There are no quotes of remorse from Hooper himself. Hooper remained, 

unfazed about a possible sanction from the IOC or the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC). “I’m not saying that I don’t care,” Hooper said “I’m just saying that I’m very proud of what I did” (qtd. in Barrett 2012)

Following Hooper’s treatment by the IOC debate was reignited which saw Indigenous leaders from across the nation demand a new Australian flag. Gracelyn Smallwood asks,

when will all this madness end of the white man’s fear of Aboriginal elite athletes wearing the colours with pride? … After 224 years of oppressing our people the white man still wants to control what we can and cannot be proud of … We’ve got news for the government and that is Aboriginal Australians, including our elite athletes, will never disrespect our culture and the flag that we identify with no matter the occasion (qtd. in Hagan 2102: 1).

Hooper questions both the validity and appropriateness of the Union Jack, “[W]e are two cultures living in one nation … we’re not Pommies, why should our flag be another flag?” (qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 22). Activist Phil Cleary called on the AOC to lobby for the Aboriginal flag to be recognised at the Olympics, “out of respect and because [in contrast to the Australian flag] it is not a symbol of conquest” (qtd. in Lane & Barrett 2012: 4). While recognition for the Aboriginal flag remains an aspirational goal, changes in May 2015 to the AOC’s constitution have been warmly received by many Indigenous Olympic athletes. The amended constitution now reads: “To recognise the heritage, culture and contribution of our nation’s first people, and to give practical support to indigenous reconciliation through sport” (AOC 2016). While the amendment to the AOC’s constitution is a positive step forward, the Australian flag remains the only one permitted to be flown at the Olympic Games. As the AOC notes, “International

114 A British immigrant / national.
Following this discussion two things are evident. First, for some Aboriginal people the Australian national flag remains a colonial symbol of sovereignty which defies any imaginings of ‘unity’. The national flag’s representational capability is thus ‘deficient’ and warrants supplementation with the Aboriginal flag, as Freeman and Hooper both demonstrate. Second, official reactions to the public display of the Aboriginal flag are, in some cases, as Smallwood attests, indicative of a perceived threat; of “the white man’s fear”. Geoff Hocking states, “the flag, as a symbol, has always been recognized as one of the most important tools for bringing together peoples of like minds, or peoples of common experience” (2002: 44). Understanding the flag in these terms we can see how the current Australian national flag has the capacity to fail those whose collective experience stands in sharp contrast to the “common experience” of white Australians.

Patty Mills

Patrick “Patty” Mills is an elite basketball player. His father is from Thursday Island in the Torres Strait and his mother is a member of the Stolen Generations. Mills competed at the 2012 London Olympic Games where he and his teammates held a ‘semi-serious’ “flag raising, with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags ceremoniously unpacked and then draped over the balcony” (Wright 2013: 32).
As noted the IOC is stringent with its rules, including the use of political statements and non-approved flags. In this instance Green resolved the issues which emerged from the display of the unauthorised flags and they stayed up.

Mills states, “I have an Indigenous background and feel there’s a part of me that has to represent and show where I’m from, and part of the culture, just like everyone else on the team” (qtd. in Wright 2013: 32). From this comment Mills infers that while white Australians are represented by the cultural symbolism of the Australian national flag, his Indigenous heritage is overlooked. This assertion of a different mode of meaning-making from flags centralises the notion that signification is culturally understood. Guenter explains, “[F]lags are visual symbols, with both aesthetic and emotional draws based on the cultural stance of the person viewing them” (2016: 3). Through Mills’ Indigenous lens the Australian flag is seen and understood as an exclusive symbol of cultural identity. I now draw attention the Torres Strait Islands and their
flag, which Mills acknowledges has deep significance, “[M]y heritage and my culture and where I’m from mean the most to me, more than anything” (Mills qtd. in Witz 2014).

**Torres Strait Islands, Mabo and the Torres Strait Islander Flag**

The Torres Strait Islands consist of some 250 small islands situated in the waters of the Torres Strait, between Cape York Peninsula and Papua New Guinea and are a designated part of the State of Queensland. Among these islands is Bedanug, which in 1770 Cook both ‘claimed’ and ‘re-named’. Cook’s territorial acts linger, they signify a blatant disregard for Indigenous people which continues to haunt the nation,

> [O]ur people have been living here for thousands of years, hunting dugongs, fishing and trading. We are a seafaring people. When we saw the foreign ship approaching, we used smoke signals to warn each other. Our people did not agree to Cook’s declaration of possession of our land. There was no treaty. There was no consent. … This is the original grievance which Australia must now make right (Bourne & Bedford 2017: 25).

From the mid-1800s and on several fronts life for Torres Strait Islander people was irrevocably altered by colonial forces. These included missionaries who repressed traditional beliefs and sought to inculcate Islanders with Christianity. The pearling and bêche-de-mer (sea cucumber) industries also exploited local people as cheap labour. Furthermore in 1898, the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition accelerated cultural denigration by the collection and removal of over twelve hundred culturally significant objects (Nakata 2001). Underpinning these intrusions were the assimilationist government administrators. For example, during the first half of the twentieth century, and under the guise of protection, the Queensland government kept the Islanders segregated from mainland Australia controlling where and when they could work and travel (Langton & Loos 2008).

Eddie “Koiki” Mabo of the Meriam nation, was born on one of the smallest and most remote islands known as Mer, or Murray Island. At aged 15 Mabo was disciplined and sent to
Thursday Island for twelve months. Pat Killoran, Protector of the Torres Strait Islands, forbade Mabo from travelling south and ordered him to work on the local trochus (sea snail) luggers. By the late 1950s Islanders were permitted to work on the Australian mainland where they performed menial tasks. At Hughenden, in western Queensland, Mabo worked on the railways. When in town, Mabo, his wife and small children were refused accommodation, so they slept at the railway station. These practices were replicated for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who lived in Queensland during the 1960s, as the State “intensified its draconian racialist grip on their lives” (Langton & Loos 2008: 339).

In the 1970s Mabo was made aware that his home, Murray Island, was classified as Crown land. Mabo refused to accept that the Crown owned all rights in relation to his land and became determined to prove otherwise. (Reynolds 2000; Langton & Loos 2008). In June 1992, after a protracted legal battle, and in the same year that the Torres Strait Islander flag was created, the High Court’s Mabo decision was finally realised,

[H]is flaring imagination, intellect and courage finally enabled him to persist through the ten years of the Meriam High Court challenge that acknowledged the native title that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had to their land ‘since time immemorial’. He died of cancer on 21 January 1992, four months before the High Court decision swept away the concept of terra nullius. This is now referred to as the Mabo decision, or sometimes simply Mabo (Langton & Loos 2008: 333).

On the proviso that there was a demonstrable and continuous link with land and traditions, the Mabo decision facilitated opportunities and possibilities for Aboriginal people on mainland Australia. In reality though colonial law ensures that native title is difficult to prove. Given the relationship between colonial power and land, it follows that the displacement of Aboriginal people from their land was an essential weapon of colonisation. The result of this disruption makes it often impossible to establish an unbroken link to country and culture. In other words,
the very nature of colonial dispossession complicates and thwarts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ claims for native title.

In the aftermath of Mabo and the disclosure of the myth of *terra nullius*, questions were raised that challenged official narratives of Australian history and perceived threats surrounding notions of legitimacy provoked an outburst,

> [T]he reaction of the vested interests ranged against the Indigenous inheritors of native title was hysterical and vindictive. While the Murray islanders celebrated, pastoralists and miners expressed more and more wild theories and fears for the future of the Australian land tenure system and whether Aborigines would demand compensation (Langton & Loos 2008: 371).

Attwood states that this anxiety promotes ideas “that symbols of the British Australian past will be abandoned or severely eroded, for instance, that the Union Jack will be replaced by a symbol of the Aboriginal presence” (1996b: 105-6). The Union Jack is the signifier of white possession and for many the Union Jack on the Australian flag is the tangible marker of what it means to be ‘Australian’. For those whose vested interests lie in maintaining the mythology surrounding a legitimate and peaceful settlement, the national flag is extolled as a symbol of shared values, identity and heritage.115 The national flag however, as Mills attests, could not ‘speak’ to or for, Torres Strait Islanders.

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The Torres Strait Islander flag was designed by the late Bernard Namok of Thursday Island. It was created in 1992 as a result of a cultural revival workshop. The Torres Strait Islander flag symbolises the unity and identity of all Torres Strait Islander peoples. The flag’s colours: green, blue, black and white represent the land, the sea, the people, and peace, respectively. The flag’s central symbols are the dhari and a five-pointed star. The former represents a dancer’s head-dress and the latter represents the five major island groups. The star is also a reminder of the importance of navigation to the seafaring people (Commonwealth of Australia 2010: 28).

The Torres Strait Islander flag is now over twenty years old. Despite this, it is evident that for some Australians knowledge about this flag is limited. For example in Melbourne’s North West, the Australian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags are flown at the Malahang Reserve in Heidelberg West Park. However, over a period of two years the Torres Strait Islander flag was stolen five times due to misconceptions about its origins. Banyule Mayor Craig Langdon told the Heidelberg Leader that he believed the flag was being stolen after he received a call from a local woman telling him she did not like the “Arabic” flag:
He said the caller asked whether he was proud of the flags flying at the reserve.

“I said of course I was proud of the flags, and she said ‘we don’t like the Arabic flag’,” Cr Langdon said.

“I said no it’s not, they’re the three official flags of Australia.”

Cr Langdon said the caller remained staunch that she and others in the community believed the flag was Arabic (qtd. in Thorpe 2016).

In order to counter both the confusion and the expense of replacing the Torres Strait Islander flag, the council decided to invest in educational signage to clarify the flags’ status and history. Mayor Langton confirms that the signs, combined with the publicity attracted, have worked – the Torres Strait Islander flag has not been stolen since March 2016 (pers. comm., 15 November 2016). Bernard Namok Jnr, from Badu and Darnley Islands, airs his frustration at the lack of public education regarding his father’s flag, “twenty years on, there is still more education needed about Australia’s Indigenous cultures and in particular the Torres Strait Islander flag, colours, symbols and designer” (qtd. in Koori Mail 9 March 2016: 23). His response has been to create a documentary which not only keeps his father’s legacy alive, but also informs and educates the wider population (Thorpe 2016).116

Conclusion

Indigenous resistance to colonial rule is a long-standing practice which, since first contact, has been expressed in a multitude of ways. In this chapter I have discussed a range of these expressions. Grounded in culture, expressions of resistance by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people stridently reject the imposition of an exclusive Australian identity that has been forged out of colonial ideology and symbolism. This is made evident by McCrae, who despite the ‘protection’ and assimilation policies which actively sought to extinguish age old customs and traditions, has kept his culture alive through his artwork. Long-standing protests

116 “Carry the Flag” (Namok 2017).
also elucidate the resistance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The protracted fight for land rights as demonstrated by the Gurindji and Eddie Mabo was fortified by their refusal to acquiesce. The Aboriginal Tent Embassy endures as a permanent visual protest site of resistance, a place where ongoing activism to the colonial project is daily performed. Through various acts which foreground the Aboriginal flag, Burnum Burnum and most recently, elite athletes such as Freeman and Hooper demonstrate how the Aboriginal flag signifies as both a statement of resistance, as well as a powerful marker of cultural identity. The athletes’ responses cited in this chapter highlight how the Australian national flag fails to be fully representative. In order to further understand this, Chapter Seven is devoted to various reactions to the Australian national flag by Indigenous people.
CHAPTER SEVEN: Seeing Red … White and Blue

We want to be proud of a flag that we fly and the current Australian flag just doesn’t sit well because of its dark history ... How can we be proud as Aboriginal Australians and see the sight of the Union Jack and what that flag has done in the past, the genocide the rape and the murder and the stolen children? I can’t stand for that. That’s why I never fly that flag at my fights. I want a flag that represents all of us.

(Anthony Mundine qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 22).

Introduction

Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues that for Indigenous people the effects of white possession are palpable. She states “white possession is not unmarked, unnamed, or invisible; it is hypervisible … signs of white possession are embedded everywhere in the landscape” (Moreton-Robinson 2015: xiii). In order to discover what the national symbol might represent to some Indigenous people, this chapter channels Moreton-Robinson’s theory of ‘hypervisibility’ directly onto the Australian flag. Currently, hegemonic ways of seeing or understanding the national flag effectively seal and steal the discussions which frame it; knowledge outside of dominant discourses is often silenced, or rendered invisible. Much of today’s rhetoric about the flag is couched in comfortable terms of reference which speak to tradition, sentiment and history. What is frequently ignored in this discourse, until it becomes conspicuous through the manifestation of overt forms of nationalism, is the political component of the flag. The Australian national flag is typically imagined as an everyday emblem and is neither seen nor understood as an object which privileges white Australia.

In Chapter Five I note bell hooks’ comment that flags, when employed as symbols of whiteness, have the capacity to transmit racialised messages of trauma, exclusion and oppression. hooks’ understanding of the ways that flags function can be transposed to the Australian context where we see that attachment to the national flag is also based on concepts of white supremacy. For white Australia understandings of ownership, entitlement and legitimacy have been inherited and are deployed under the flag to justify white autonomy over
Indigenous dispossession. It is precisely this enduring act of dispossession, which is symbolised in the flag that ensures the continuity of trauma referred to by hooks. The on-going act of dispossession is accompanied by national narratives that ratify claims to sovereignty. These stories formulate the nation’s understanding of itself and are derived from privileged ways of ‘knowing’ that have generally avoided both intellectual analysis and public scrutiny (see Stanner 1974; White 1981; Billig 2013; Moreton-Robinson 2015). If the racialised properties of the national flag seldom receive considered attention in the public sphere,\textsuperscript{117} it follows that the manufacture of a nationalism deeply embedded in a white supremacist colonial history remains tightly woven into the fabric of Australia’s national flag. With this in mind, the task at hand, for this chapter, is to consider, through various forms of evidence, Indigenous peoples’ understandings of the national flag. Dovetailed throughout this discussion are the standpoints of Indigenous leaders who spoke out in support of Damien Hooper in the aftermath of the 2012 London Olympic Games. They demand a new flag.\textsuperscript{118}

“Welcome to my nightmare” (Kevin Buzzacott qtd. in Gilbert 2000: 8).

I begin with a narrative that tells of Uncle Kevin Buzzacott, a South Australian Arabunna Elder, who spent several years traversing his country while taking stock of its destruction. Armed with an Australian national flag Buzzacott tracked the damage done to his country back to its source at Parliament House, Canberra,

\textsuperscript{117} There are exceptions. Roz Ward, an academic from La Trobe University, Melbourne, Victoria, was suspended over a private Facebook post in which she quipped the Australian flag was “racist” (Graham 2016; see also Ward in Thornton 2017).

\textsuperscript{118} These interviews were conducted by then National Indigenous Times reporter, Geoff Bagnall, and arguably provide the most comprehensive written collection of Indigenous responses to Australia’s national flag to date.
… from Lake Eyre, where the largest uranium mine in the world, Western Mining’s Roxby Olympic Mine, is depleting the underground waters of the Artesian Basin at the rate of 42 million litres a day to wash yellowcake. Radioactive tailings have already polluted the underground waters and the sacred mound springs are drying up. He has tracked the trail of evil to the burrow [Parliament House] in the sacred mountain [Capital Hill, Canberra] where the laws originate to permit the destruction to proceed (Gilbert 2000: 8).

When Buzzacott arrived at the Tent Embassy, the Australian flag that had ‘accompanied’ him and was referred to as ‘The Predator’ or ‘The White Flag of Genocide’, was buried in the ashes of the Tent Embassy fire (Gilbert 2000). This sacred fire had been established on 26 January 1998 as part of a ‘Fire Ceremony for Peace’ (Dow 2000). Buzzacott states, “[W]e will keep this fire burning until the law makers come and talk to us about recognising our sovereignty” (Dow 2000: 20). In order to express a heightened sense of disdain and frustration with the white Australian nation, Buzzacott periodically exhumed the national flag.

For example in July 1998, Supreme Court Judge Justice Crispin visited the Tent Embassy to investigate acts of genocide committed against Aboriginal people. In a powerful statement Buzzacott removed the flag from the ashes, laid it before Crispin and declared “[W]elcome to my nightmare” (Gilbert 2000: 8). Here the national flag is conceptualised as a terrifying dream from which Buzzacott cannot escape. The Australian flag symbolises the ongoing destruction of his country and kin. The Union Jack, the ‘honoured’ component of the Australian national flag acts as a tangible reminder of colonial malevolence.119 As stated the disparities experienced by many Indigenous people in areas of health, incarceration rates and life expectancy are far greater than those of non-Indigenous people. Sherry Saggers and Dennis Gray state that the “narratives of ill-health” experienced by Indigenous people, “are inextricably linked to narratives of dispossession and exclusion … and from full participation

119 On 18 December 1998 Crispin found, “that no offence of genocide is known to the domestic law of Australia” (Gilbert 2000: 10). At this time Australia had been a signatory to the Genocide Convention for fifty years. Kevin Gilbert’s son, Euroka, notes the hypocrisy, “Australia will still punish and penalise others for their atrocities but will not own up to atrocities against the Aboriginals of this land” (qtd. in Gilbert 2000: 10 emphasis in the original).
in the social, political and economic life of post-invasion Australia” (2007: 17). The “narratives of dispossession and exclusion” are made visually apparent through the symbolism of the Australian national flag, which does little to reverse Buzzacott’s sense of malaise.

In February 1999 then Prime Minister John Howard refused to engage with delegates at the Tent Embassy. Howard also rejected an invitation to attend a Fire Ceremony and discuss the Declaration for Peace, which demanded recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty, and called for an apology, as well as the termination of the ongoing policies and practices of genocide. Howard’s negative responses prompted the Tent Embassy delegates to take “peace-talk making fires” to Parliament House (Gilbert 2000: 10). On each occasion the Fire for Peace was desecrated by officials. Two days after the desecration of the third fire, Buzzacott once more removed the flag from the ashes of the Embassy fire and in a public ceremony he speared “the ash-covered Australian flag, The Predator, to kill the evil power over this land” (Gilbert 2000: 8). The ‘evil’ referred to recalls the first days of white invasion which over time became a full-scale assault of the continent and its people. This offensive, Buzzacott argues, has been authorised under the colours of red, white and blue, “[T]he Ceremony is our way of dealing with the evil that is being committed under the banner of the blue, white and red” (Buzzacott qtd. in Gilbert 2000: 8; see also Dow 2000). The Australian flag is thus marked by Buzzacott as a hypervisible signifier: a blatant marker of evil and oppression that represents the continuity of colonial violence.

Sam Watson adds a further dimension,

Aboriginal people have had no part in the selection of the Union Jack as part of the Australian flag and as an Aboriginal person I totally reject that and as always I pay my absolute respect for Uncle Harold Thomas and I thank him again for his contribution to the struggle of our people by designing our flag.

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120 On the 8th, 10th and 15th of February (Dow 2000; Gilbert 2000).
There is no history represented by the Union Jack, just a terrible litany of human rights abuses. The Union Jack, if anything, should be elevated up there with the Swastika. It really does not represent Aboriginal people, it represents the really worst aspects of history since 1788 (qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 27).

Watson draws attention to the fact that Aboriginal people have not been consulted about the Union Jack’s inclusion on the national flag and that it symbolises the brutality and perpetuation of the colonial project. In order to destroy the colours of ‘evil’: the red, white and blue, Michael Anderson, of the Euahlayi Nation and Convenor of the Sovereign Union (see Chapter Three) completed the journey which Uncle Kevin began, “The Predator is going back to the Queen in London ... If we don’t destroy the evil before it destroys us, our spirituality and connectedness to land is doomed” (Buzzacott qtd. in Gilbert 2000: 8).

1999: ‘The Australian Flag of Genocide’ aka ‘the Predator Flag’

On Commonwealth Day, 8 March 1999, Anderson flung the well-travelled, ash-covered flag, “the Australian flag of genocide to the British Crown at Buckingham Palace” (Gilbert 2000: 15). This was a foundational act which ensured the correct establishment of the Sovereign Union:

Ghillar, Michael Anderson, was tasked with returning the evil in the Australian/British ‘Predator’ flag – the Union Jack – through a sacred ceremony, which he carried from Euahlayi and other Nations, to the Gates of Buckingham Palace, where after conducting the Ceremony and Song placed the flag on a ceremonial spear and hurled it over the gates of Buckingham Palace and into its forecourt. This action permitted the rightway to build the momentum for the current Sovereignty Movement (Sovereign Union 2016).

In this instance the Union Jack and by association the Australian national flag, are described as the “Predator” flag. The flag is understood as being representative of a corporeal body, a

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121 Commonwealth Day is held on the second Monday in March every year. It celebrates the diversity of the Commonwealth and promotes peace, democracy and equality.
living predator that has preyed upon, plundered from, destroyed and exploited Aboriginal peoples and their lands since first contact.

Anderson explains,

[T]he genocide tracks back to the British Crown … Successive British monarchs signed papers legalising the killing of Aborigines and approving the forced adoption program of the Stolen Generations. By killing the evil and returning the flag to where it belongs, our people are being released from the evils of colonialism. We can at last have a chance to heal our wounds (qtd. in Gilbert 2000: 15).

Anderson states that the Australian flag is returned to “where it belongs” and with its extradition there is a cathartic sense of liberation. This leads me to hypothesise about the ubiquitous nature of the Australian flag, and how at each encounter, this symbol of colonial rule makes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people ‘feel’; in other words, what emotional, physical and psychological responses are produced in the presence of the national flag and what impact this has on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples in the everyday? The
Australian flag is however, more than just a colonial symbol, it cannot simply be relegated to the symbolic domain. The flag’s ubiquity as an officially sanctioned material object, I would argue, has a reach beyond symbolism that has the potential to generate fear and a distaste that might produce real, psycho-physical effects. As this research has progressed, it has become apparent that for many, the national flag is in fact a hypervisible manifestation of white sovereignty. The national flag’s associated spectrum of uses and applications; its presence in all public spheres of human activity constitutes a material documentation of white supremacy and violence. The national flag’s importance to the colonial, and nation-building project are best understood when we expose the rules and regulations that seek to protect the nation’s most ‘sacred’ and indeed ‘valuable’ emblem.

**The Burning Issue**

The national flag is saturated with bureaucratic regulations. These include protocols which dictate the flag’s correct use, its flying, handling and disposal. According to the Commonwealth of Australia the flag is also imbued with “dignity” (2010: 5). To preserve the flag’s “dignity”:

- The flag should not be allowed to fall or lie on the ground.
- The flag should not be used to cover a statue, monument or plaque for an unveiling ceremony; to cover a table or seat; or to mask boxes, barriers or the space between the floor and the ground level on a dais or platform.
- The flag should never be flown when in damaged, faded or dilapidated condition (Commonwealth of Australia 2010: 5).

To dispose of a flag:

- When a flag becomes dilapidated and no longer suitable for use, it should be destroyed privately and in a dignified way. For example, it may be cut into small
unrecognisable pieces then disposed of with the normal rubbish collection (Commonwealth of Australia 2010: 5).

- The most dignified way to dispose of a flag when it is no longer serviceable is to burn it (Smith 1975: 92-93).
- The flag should be destroyed in such a way that it is no longer recognisable as a flag, such as cutting up or shredding into small pieces of fabric. Disposal by burning is only appropriate for a flag made of wool or cotton, as synthetic materials are toxic when burned. When the flag has been destroyed, the remains should be wrapped tightly or sealed in a bag or box before disposal (Kelly 2017: 134).

Archie Moore comments on the rigor of flag-flying rules and regulations. He argues that “the very existence of National Flag Protocols – begs the question of who these protocols are for and why we might need them” (Moore 2015: 120). Foucault explains that the discursive formation of an object is facilitated by a “complex group of relations” which, “are established between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization” (1997: 45). Following Foucault, the above-mentioned protocols constitute a prescriptive set of regulations which discursify the flag according to established “systems of norms”. That is to say, the regulations set out above are comprehensible (and deemed reasonable) precisely because they are formed through the “complex group of relations” whose very complexity has been normalised. So, we do not see how these protocols operate to “dignify” the flag; we just know that they do. According to these protocols, the flag must represent newness, purity, and modernity. As a carefully preserved icon, the flag must be revered and reflect the nation’s aspirations for self-preservation and national unity, never to be tattered, frayed or disrespected in any way, but always emblematic of a wholesome entirety that is upright, undivided, and knows its place in the world. The
metaphorical resonances of these rules are significant: the flag must always be intact. Any ‘unrecognisable’ pieces, or a flag “no longer serviceable” (presumed aged or damaged) must be discarded, unseen, or burnt in the interests of projecting an untarnished whole flag as the symbol of a unified, coherent nation. Through the performative act of ‘flag disposal’, (or sacrifice), the nation is re-born, “…national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process” (Bhabha 1994: 209). What is aged or damaged, deemed unwholesome or unseemly, must be removed from sight. Any ‘scraps’ must be discarded. The flag must not ‘fall or lie on the ground’; it must conform to the illusion of social cohesiveness by demonstrating its upright-ness.

In addition to what the flag can and cannot represent in nationalist discourse, its utility is also decreed: it cannot be used to cover other cultural artefacts but should stand alone, its authority undeterred and unchallenged. The flag, this most prominent symbol of national culture, must at all costs reflect the conformity and uniformity of the nation. If or when it ceases to do so, it must be expunged from the nation. Forged from of a complex network of power, the flag is thus shaped and protected by an intricate web of relations, “… these relations are not present in the object; it is not they that are deployed when the object is being analysed (Foucault 1997: 45). The national flag therefore, presents as a seemingly innocuous signifier of nation that is normalised through various systems of ‘knowing’ and strengthened by the ubiquity of its presence as the primary cultural object of nation. Any failure to critically analyse the Australian flag serves to reinforce it as an unmarked and invisible signifier of whiteness.
1996: The White Flag

In response to the 1996 Federal budget cut of $400 million from a wide range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, hundreds of protesters rallied in Canberra, “… as a strong statement of unity by more than two thousand blackfellas: *It’s our day today. We’ll do this our way … dances, songs and stories are performed*” (Gilbert & Williams 1996: 70 emphasis in the original). Eleanor Williams argues that it was the pain associated with the stories, which compelled the group to act and burn the Australian flag. She recounts,

> [A]s the TV cameras film, the white flag, ‘symbol of genocide’ burns to the drone of didgeridoo:

> Anyone, everyone, come stamp on the ashes

> like they stamped on the ashes of our Peoples.

A gentle lady rises to speak:

> I’ve waited fifty years to see this.

How many watching the news tonight will know ‘the ashes’ refer to the ‘boong’ fires’ lit to destroy the evidence of massacres? (Gilbert & Williams 1996: 70 emphasis in the original).

From Williams’ account a correlation is made between the massacres committed and the stamping on the ashes of the flag which highlights a new and traumatic facet to the national symbol.

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122 These included cuts to legal services, domestic violence centres, youth training, artists’ cooperatives, child care and health centres (Gilbert & Williams 1996). Northern Land Council Chairman, Galarrwuy Yunupingu, was reported as saying “the cuts were ‘a spear in our heart’ for self-determination. Aboriginal people would die at the hands of the Federal Government because of the cuts” (qtd. in AIATSIS 2016).

123 A derogatory term used to describe Aboriginal people (Wilkes 1985).

124 In Western Australia, for example, Aboriginal bodies were burnt to destroy evidence of massacres. This practice “continued into the 1920s and 1930s at least and was aided and abetted by the pervasive conspiracy of silence that … remained stronger than any belief in the rule of law” (Owen 2016: 391; see also Charola & Meakins 2016: Chapter 3).
As this work progresses it becomes evident that the Australian flag, a symbol which is hegemonically endorsed via the projection of religious, political and regional affiliations to the colonising nation, is guaranteed to be divisive,

… in new, insecure nations the flags and other national symbols … often bring to the fore strong divisions within the putative nation … They [national symbols] must not only keep alive, but create a national identity and an allegiance to a state that did not exist before (Kolstø 2006: 679 emphasis in the original).

While Kolstø’s claims are not directed at the Australian nation, his argument can be extrapolated. From evidence provided national inclusion is symbolically denied to Indigenous people through the symbols which were designed to foster the creation of a white “national identity” and an “allegiance to a state that did not exist before”. The creation of Australian symbols typically function to lend legitimacy to the historically “new” claims of Australia as a white possession. In addition to this, “… white subjects are disciplined … to invest in the nation as a white possession that imbues them with a sense of belonging and ownership” (Moreton-Robinson 2015: 52). While white perceptions of the Australian flag combine with an inherent sense of ownership and entitlement, they are at odds with Indigenous understandings which as the epigraph states, perceive the flag as an unrepresentative symbol of exclusion and division,

[T]he Australian flag is the white people’s flag. The things that have been done to Aboriginal people, including dispossession, disempowerment, the Northern Territory Intervention, the denial of the rights of Aboriginal people and even the taking away of all of our children, were done under the colour of that rotten, stinking white flag (Michael Mansell qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 25).

Mansell’s associations with the “white people’s flag” are explicit: the flag connotes disempowerment, dispossession and destruction. Seen in this way, through its unambiguous colonial associations, the Australian flag represents the exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the body politic. As it flies the current Australian flag is incapable of facilitating mutual feelings of national belonging and inclusion for many Indigenous people:
The white flag doesn’t represent us. It represents our destruction, our enslavement. Why would be (sic) bloody well wan (sic) to be represented by that flag. … at some time in the future, at the stage where Aboriginal people are recognised as human beings in this country, at the point where our sovereignty was recognised, the flag would have to change (Les Coe qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 24).

2006: The Flag of Oppression

On 26 January 2006, Wayne Wharton burnt the Australian flag in Brisbane. As it burnt he expressed his disdain to the media. Wharton argues that the flag represents “the continued oppression of Indigenous Australians and represents all that is ugly about a Coalition Government committed to minimising expenditure on Indigenous specific programs” (qtd. in Hagan 2010: 32). Wharton’s act triggered a public outcry that caused Bill Mason, Queensland President of the RSL to assert that burning the national flag should be made a criminal offence (Hagan 2010). Prime Minister Howard responded, “[T]he Australian flag is more closely held and held more dearly by Australians than at any time that I can remember” (qtd. in The Age 2006). He stated that while the desecration of the flag was “offensive, I don’t think it represents mainstream Aboriginal opinion … Much as I despise what they did I do not believe it should be a criminal offence” (qtd. in The Age 2006). He gave two reasons for his stance. Firstly, he argued that burning the flag was a form of political protest. Furthermore, he claimed, criminalising the act would “only turn yahoo behaviour into martyrdom” (qtd. in The Age 2006).

Howard’s response conveys a potent level of anxiety regarding democratic rights and their potential for political dissension, or violence. This can be seen in fact, as a sleight of hand where democratic freedom of speech is being sanctioned as an authorised right for all, while being simultaneously disparaged as a potential call to dissent that could result in martyrdom, the sacrificial elevation of a cause seen to transgress social unity. Actions such as flag burning

125 Note: Under Howard’s watch the 1996 National Flag Day and the Flags Amendment Bill were introduced.
rarely happen in isolation and while the public might be ‘outraged’, the event needs to be contextualised and understood as a deep-seated response. Robert Van Krieken et al. explain, “[S]uch behaviours … are rooted in social processes that are highly complex and that cannot be reduced to the dull weight of external social forces” (2000: 14). Wharton’s activism exemplifies this claim; his burning of the flag is a direct response to the inter-generational experiences of colonialism “[R]acism was at my doorstep for as long as I can remember. We grew up in a camp … because blackfellas weren’t allowed to live in towns” (Wharton qtd. in Hagan 2013:15).

The ensuing debate drew attention to the complexity of social processes that generates Indigenous political activism and also, to the ways in which Indigenous activism can be excised from Howard’s ideas about “yahoo behaviour” and re-scripted into a prolonged history of Indigenous resistance,

[When a street warrior goes out and burns the flag or challenges the system, the whole world stops. They put our agenda back on the front page of the newspapers. Without these people, we’d still be sitting in the concentration camps (Wharton qtd. in Hagan 2013:15).

Wharton’s cousin, Stephen Hagan, refuses to condemn the 2006 Invasion Day burning of the national flag stating: “I understand the passion of his ways and its effect in bringing attention to the plight of our people” (Hagan 2010: 35). Hagan further claims that “the Union Jack on the national flag is a constant reminder of the British Empire that was characterised by greed, arrogance and hypocrisy” (2010: 35).

**2012: The Flag of Invasion and Division**

26 January 2012 marked the 40th anniversary of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy as it simultaneously commemorated the 224th anniversary of the First Fleet’s landing. From around the continent Indigenous people gathered at the Embassy to celebrate an iconic 40 year protest.
The event was marred by then Liberal-National Opposition leader, Tony Abbott who stated, “I think the indigenous people of Australia can be very proud of the respect in which they are held by every Australian” (ABC 2012a). Abbott argued “a lot has changed since [the Embassy was established], and I think it probably is time to move on from that” (ABC 2012a). Abbott’s comments quickly transformed, “[L]ike a game of Chinese whispers, media then embellished it further until finally it was reported Abbott wanted the Embassy ‘torn down’” (Graham 2012: 19). As news of Abbott’s ‘tearing down the Embassy’ comments took hold Abbott, and then Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, were attending an awards ceremony at a 5 star, glass enclosed restaurant which was in close proximity to the Tent Embassy.

A group of protesters surrounded the restaurant, banged on the glass and chanted. In the melee the Prime Minister’s bodyguards “dragged a stumbling Julia Gillard … missing a shoe and clinging to one of her four federal police close personal protection officers” to ‘safety’ (Welch 2012: 4). Images of the ‘riot’ made headlines around the world. According to a New York Times blog the riot was “a combustible mixture of race, social status and the juxtaposition of a leader dining in a glass-walled restaurant only steps from a decades-old protest encampment” (Welch 2012: 4). On 27 January, in the aftermath of the previous day’s disturbance and with the intention of making white Australians take notice, protesters from the Tent Embassy marched to Parliament House to burn the national flag,

[A] protester, Wayne “Coco” Wharton, announced that the Australian flag flying on the building “had allowed white people to rape, murder and destroy our people for 224 years, and we’re going to burn it.” An Australian flag was then set alight as the crowd chanted “Always was, always will be Aboriginal land” (Welch et al. 2012: 1).
From the photographs (above and below) another dimension to this investigation is considered. Could the Australian national flag have the capacity to transmit trans-generational trauma? Christine Choo states,

[T]he health and welfare of contemporary Aboriginal people must be considered in the context of the intergenerational impacts of their social, cultural and historical backgrounds. This is especially true in our study of the health of children (2016:102).

The protesters here are young, some are children. Indicative of their vitriol they spit on and participate in the ritualistic burning of the national flag. Neil Jarman notes that “destroying the flag allows both for a real expression of anger and is also a symbolic act of revenge or aggression against the particular enemy nation” (2007: 91). The questions raised here are whether or not the Union Jack on the nation’s flag, alongside its colours of red, white and blue,
place an additional psychological and emotional burden on the upcoming generations? Is it possible that the flag can be internalised by children as a marker of their exclusion in the body politic? Do they understand the flag as a symbol which signifies their disinheritance? Do they carry with them the knowledge that the Australian flag is a symbol which has failed to serve generations of their ancestors? Perhaps a closer look at the photographs may shed light on this.

Each photograph can be read as a manifestation of rage and outrage, and also sadness: there is sadness on the faces of the children. There is also a sense of determination and resolve, and in both images, a methodical intensity that resembles ritual whereby the flag is destroyed and spat upon with a focused degree of intent. This is a solemn event staged near Parliament House. The flag is reduced to ashes while its destroyers parade their sovereignty through a display of Aboriginal colours, draped flags, t-shirts, ochre and other cultural signifiers that coalesce in a rite that erases both the symbolic and tangible power of the national flag.

![Figure 23: The vitriol of Indigenous youth is directed onto the Australian national flag at Parliament House (Image: Meares 2012).](image)

Acts of resistance that seek to subvert the status quo inevitably attract attention. Following this event, Chris Graham notes “Australians were outraged” (2012: 19). Then Northern Territory Labor Minister for Young Territorians, Rob Knight claims,
[F]or some little pricks to get there and stomp on our flag and set fire to it - there should be laws against it ... I think it's absolutely disgusting, and they’ve lost my support, and I think they’ve lost the majority support of Australians (qtd. in ABC News 2012b).

Knight’s condemnation in this instance whitewashes the lived realities of colonial domination and perpetuates the disturbing pattern of bureaucratic complacency. Knight’s criticism is also an exercise of power, “[T]he objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types ... in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (Bhabha 1994: 101). To further emphasise his moral outrage Knight invoked an argument which continues to successfully ‘armour’ the flag. He claimed the flag, under which Australians have gone into battle, had been defaced by the protestors. While the effectiveness of this rhetoric has been discussed in Chapter Five, it is worth remembering that for many Australians, this claim is as appealing as it is powerful. Mythologising the flag by invoking “past sacrifices ... in the name of the present” (Billig 2013: 77) effectively obstructs the circulation of other perspectives.

In response to the criticism Dodson asserts that open condemnation is far too simplistic, “[Y]ou have got to look to why people are frustrated and why people feel that aggressive behaviour like that is required” (qtd. in ABC News 2012b). Jenny Munroe adds further context, '[T]he Union Jack has no relevance to our people. It is a symbol of our oppression, it is a symbol of invasion, it’s a symbol of us being the beggars instead of the billionaires in our own land ... I think the Union Jack should be got rid of and we should find some other symbol that unifies us rather than divides us, which is what that current flag actually does – it divides us (qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 24).

Munroe argues that the national flag does not serve her people; rather it is perceived as a symbol of disinheritance, of poverty and division. In contrast for white Australians the interplay between national flag, national values and national identity is compelling. Flag, ideals and identity sustain each other as the embodiment of national belonging. For minority groups however, the “flag may heighten the salience of national outgroup membership ... potentially
lowering collective self-esteem or heightening social exclusion” (Butz, Plant, & Doerr 2007: 406). Maurie Japarta Ryan states,

[T]he flag of Australia represents the British government and it’s a symbol for that … When Cook landed this country was 100 per cent Aboriginal. In 2012 it is 2 per cent Aboriginal. Get rid of the English flag… (qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 25).

2014: “It’s really depressing … to continue to have such a flag” (Marianne Mackay qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 25).

In 2014, leaders from the world’s 20 major economies including Australia, gathered in Brisbane for the G20 Summit. Indigenous peoples from across the continent also gathered for a week of cultural and political meetings at the Aboriginal Sovereign Tent Embassy in Brisbane. Peaceful protest marches were held over four days which drew attention to the unacceptable levels of Indigenous incarceration rates, suicide, deaths in custody, and child removal. Then Prime Minister Tony Abbott once again ignited the wrath of many Indigenous people at this time when he declared to the national and international media,

[I]t’s hard to think that back in 1788 (Australia) was nothing but bush and the marines and the convicts and the sailors that straggled off those 12 ships just a few hundred yards from where we are now must have thought they’d come almost to the moon (qtd. in Waters 2014: 15).

Abbott’s comments impelled Wharton and others to act, “we have to resort to symbolism to show our disgust in your colonial leadership” (Wharton qtd. in Piotrowski & Thackery 2014). On the final day of the G20 Summit, six Australian flags were defaced with words and symbols. The flags were paraded before a crowd of approximately 300 people by a group of about 50 who were outraged by Abbott’s comments. They were then set alight, one after the other, each burning flag enflaming the next, as the protesters chanted “resist, revise, decolonise” (Piotrowski & Thackery 2014).
Reactions to the flag burning were mixed within the Indigenous community as the protest once again sent a signal to an international audience, “[I]mages of the Australian flag burning went around the world and … let the world know relations between Aboriginal Australia and non-Aboriginal Australia are not ideal” (Waters 2014: 15). The unyielding nature of race politics underpins Wharton’s struggle. Anger and frustrations are vented on a flag which symbolises the seismic failure of a nation to represent and include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Wharton explains,

I still believe we haven’t got our rightful place in this country. But I don’t enjoy it, I don’t get any pleasure out of it. I find it frustrating and I find it very disheartening that we’ve still got to do this sort of stuff. I get really disillusioned at what the invaders have done to my people … (qtd. in Hagan 2013:15).

Marianne Mackay’s struggle is similar and her words about the Australian national flag are worth citing in detail,
The Australian flag is not allowed anywhere inside my house. To have a flag with the Union Jack that represents everything that this country represents in regards to dispossession of land and culture, I think it’s really depressing for the Australian government to continue have such a flag that doesn’t truly represent the nation on a national level. To totally ignore everything our people have gone through since the invasion and to celebrate the flag the way they do is just a total disregard for our feelings and what our people have been through, but it’s also a total disregard for what Australia stands for. They call Australia the lucky country, but it’s not lucky for us, and if they’re going to have a flag that represents us today they just need to scrap it and get a whole new one (qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 25).

Mackay’s words express justifiable anger and contempt but they also draw attention to what she believes Australia ‘should’ stand for. She identifies the national flag as a symbol that white Australians celebrate which she argues is incongruous, given the history of invasion and the on-going realities of colonial oppression. Any ideological notions of Australia as the “lucky country”, as inclusive and egalitarian are dispelled at the sight of the Union Jack and Mackay mocks the hypocrisy by drawing attention to the “unlucky” and unrepresented. From Mackay’s perspective official, or indeed civil endorsement of the national flag is representative of a disdain, a ‘lack of care’ for her people. In other words, the national flag is a material artefact that symbolises white peoples’ disregard for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people and thus it presents as a hypervisible symbol which has the potential to exacerbate psychological stress. To protect herself Mackay refuses to allow Australia’s national symbol into her home.

Arte-factual Responses: Re-painting the Flag

In order to present another dimension to this discussion, I now turn to some selected works of art which explore the effects elicited by the British-Australian flag. As noted in the previous chapter, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists can challenge white ways of knowing and contest negative stereotypes through their creative output. Indigenous artistic expression is a forum where conversations are generated and audiences educated. As a site of contemporary resistance this art is invariably political,
Art is political, as every action of Aboriginal People is political, and it must be political and must always remain political and reflect the political feeling until we can grow together, until people do not need to make very hard separate statement in their art … (Gilbert qtd. in Gilbert & Williams 1996: 24 & 30).

As a potent site of activism the artworks provided make a powerful contribution to this discussion. Understandings of the flag are re-defined and re-told through art; these competing worldviews unsettle the commonplace understandings the British-Australian-symbol-of-nation.

**1985: O.H.M.S.** (Darren Kemp).

In 1985, Darren Kemp, a visual arts student from Eora Centre, Redfern, New South Wales, made a line drawing, titled: ‘**OHMS**’.¹²⁶

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¹²⁶ O.H.M.S: On His / Her Majesty's Service, dependent upon who is on the British throne.
Kemp’s sketch details the early onslaught of colonial violence that was delivered in the name of the British king. In the background of this work there is a sailing ship. To my mind this vessel of invasion is slipping away from the shore. In its wake lies a trail of destruction. Aboriginal bodies are scattered; their tools and weapons lie dormant. A small fire gently smoulders, indicating that the assault was as unexpected as it was brutal. The most confronting image however lies in the foreground. Kemp has drawn an Aboriginal man impaled by the Union Jack. The man lies on the ground, and while it is not possible to say if he is alive or dead, his left hand is firmly grasped around the base of the colonial spear. This leads me to hypothesise that perhaps those who committed the crime artfully placed the British flag in his hand: a symbolic statement of what was to come. Conversely the depiction can be construed as a final act of resistance in which the victim endeavours to excise the coloniser’s weapon, and all it represents, from his body.

The size of the colonial weapon is designed to make an impact. The flag pole is a similar length to the man lying on the ground, and the flag is as long as his shield. In a visual statement of resistance it appears as if the flag has speared the man to his country; they are as one in death, as they are in life. While the British flag might symbolise the indomitable reach and power of the colonisers, its force pales in comparison with the relationship that Indigenous people had, and continue to have, with their land:

Rock stays,
earth stays.
I die and put my bones in cave or earth.
Soon my bones become earth….
al all the same.
My spirit has gone back to my country….
my mother.

127 The explorer, John Stuart (see Chapter Four), provides an example of the power and reach exerted by the flag. In 1860, Stuart went to extraordinary lengths to place the Union Jack on top of a mountain which he believed to be the centre of the continent: Central Mount Stuart, “[W]e then gave three hearty cheers for the flag, the emblem of civil and religious liberty, and may it be a sign to the natives that the dawn of liberty, civilization, and Christianity is about to break upon them” (Stuart qtd. in Headon 1991:20).
This story is important.
It won’t change,
it is law.
It is like this earth,

Kemp presents us with a visual counter-narrative in which the Union Jack, the primary symbol of dispossession, takes centre stage. In this work Kemp forcefully links the British flag to brutal acts of violence and thus disturbs hegemonic understandings of the flag. Through Kemp’s lens, the legacy of the performative act of British sovereignty, the implantation of the flag, is a brutal one. Authorised and executed in the name of ‘His Majesty’ the flag is a territorial signifier which relegates the status of Aboriginal people and their lands to that of colonial ‘possession’ and gives weight to the assertion that “the theft of Indigenous lands and the death of Indigenous people are inextricably tied to the assumption of patriarchal white sovereignty in Australia” (Morton-Robinson 2015: 138).

From my analysis of Kemp’s work, a disconcerting reality presents itself. ‘OHMS’ was sketched over 30 years ago. Reflecting on this it becomes evident that since first contact, generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have had no respite from the significations of the British Empire inscribed in the red, white and blue. Following this, it is not implausible to suggest that the impacts associated with the current flag’s exclusive symbolism have not been given considered attention. Michael Woodley asserts,

[T]he Australian flag is a symbol of colonial Australia and that says it all. It doesn’t represent Aboriginal people, or Indigenous people of this country, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander … The Australian flag needs to represent the first Australians of this country. We are not a symbol of colonial possession. We are the first Australians … and we should be somehow, somehow included in the flag that represents Australia as a nation (qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 26).

For Kemp and Woodley, the Union Jack, and by association the Australian flag, are colonial symbols of (dis)possession, encoded with associations of violence and exclusion.
2006: We CallThem Pirates Out Here (Daniel Boyd).

Daniel Boyd’s work, We Call Them Pirates Out Here (2006) contains his response to the Anglo-centric visual narratives of ‘official’ history. In his re-working of one of the nation’s most iconic works, E. Phillips Fox’s, The Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay 1770 (1902), Boyd presents us with his painting of this scene. Deploying artistic techniques that appropriate and satirise the original, Boyd de-romanticises first contact. Cook is portrayed, not as an explorer, but as a pirate, complete with eye-patch and parrot. Through the amalgamation of the Union Jack and Jolly Roger, Boyd transforms Fox’s billowing red ensign and it becomes the “Jolly Jack” (Museum of Contemporary Art [MCA] 2015) The Jolly Jack symbolically interweaves piracy and land theft to signify the merciless act of dispossession.

\[128\] Fox’s The Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay 1770, was commissioned to celebrate Federation (1901), and was produced at a time of heightened nationalism. This painting appeased the new nation with its symbolism. It portrayed Cook as a “charitable conqueror” (Nugent 2009: 33). Cook is ‘imagined’ and subsequently portrayed in a paternalistic, somewhat heroic manner, his outstretched arm, in a command of authority, prevents his men from shooting two approaching Aboriginal warriors. Commanding the scene is a huge British red ensign. It billows behind Cook in readiness.

\[129\] It is presumed that the original pirate flags were red as ‘Jolly Roger’ is thought to be derived from the French term: jolie rouge. Certain Barbary corsairs, (pirates operating from North Africa) carried red flags adorned with symbols of violence. At the turn of the eighteenth century, however, pirates used black flags which signified “no quarter” (take no prisoners / show no mercy) or “fight to the death” (Crampton 1989a: 10). Each captain had his own design; skulls, skeletons and weapons were employed to send a clear and quickly understood message.
The design of Boyd’s work is strategic. His painting looks like a postcard and this is significant as Boyd first encountered Fox’s painting as a postcard. In their heyday postcards were formidable messengers. Until recently, they were mass produced, widely used, and could be circulated to a far-reaching audience. Holiday-makers would often send postcards to family and friends, the picture postcard was often accompanied by a few lines of news and the slogan “wish you were here”. Boyd strategically replaces this commonplace postcard slogan with, “we call them pirates out here”. His message, perhaps a direct reply to Fox, leaves his audience with little doubt that for Boyd, Cook’s act, under the auspices of the Union Jack, was one of piracy, “it’s very important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to create dialogue from their own perspective to challenge the subjective history that has been created” (Boyd qtd. in Nugent 2009: 136). Robbie Thorpe says,

[W]hen I think about the Union Jack, I think about the Skull and Cross Bones too, they go together those two. It’s the flag of the British Crown Pirate Corporation. They ruled the waves and they waived the rules (qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 27).
Boyd would like to send his ‘postcard’ to England and inform the British about what happened to his people in the name of the Empire (MCA 2015 video). A decade earlier I note, a group of Indigenous artists were invited to present their responses to a British audience.

1994: “The colours of death are red, white and blue” (Lin Onus qtd. in Chambers 1994: 26).

In 1994 an exhibition, curated by Hetti Perkins and Brenda Croft: True Colours: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists Raise the Flag, visited London, Liverpool and Leicester. The tour was organised in response to a 1993 curation by Eddie Chambers: Black people and the British Flag. Chambers argues that for British artists “the British flag has increasingly come to symbolise little more than British bigotry, racism, intolerance, and the remaining vestiges of the Rule Britannia Empire mentality” (1994: ii emphasis in the original). Likewise the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative state, “[A]s True Colours: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists Raise the Flag demonstrates, this maxim is also true for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people” (qtd. in Chambers 1994: ii emphasis in the original). Perkins and Croft co-authored the introductory essay of the exhibition catalogue where they claim that Australia’s flag is the embodiment of allegiance and subservience to Britain. Furthermore they note,

[I]f read from an aerial perspective, the continent of Australia is represented by the Union Jack floating on a sea of blue under the Southern Cross. It fails to represent the indigenous people who belong to this land or even the notion of multiculturalism which is so often touted as indicating the enlightened state of the Australian consciousness (Perkins and Croft 1994: 5).

The authority of British imperialism lingers in the Australian flag. The Union Jack remains a visual signifier that tells the world the Australian continent was once a British ‘possession’,

[A]s a portrait of a ‘British’ continent in the Southern Hemisphere, the ‘Australian’ flag well illustrates the driving force behind the implementation of the White Australia policy… (Perkins and Croft 1994: 5).
This point is well made, the White Australia Policy, the White Australian Flag and the White Australian Nation were all ‘born’ in the same year and are inextricably linked as markers of whiteness.

Richard Bell states, “[T]he white man’s flag is seen for what it is – a piece of rag symbolising dispossession and oppression of our people. FUCK THE BRITISH FLAG (and its derivatives)” (qtd. in Chambers 1994: 17 emphasis in the original). Lin Onus writes, “[T]he presence of the Union Jack is a constant reminder of horrific times and despair. The colours of death are red, white and blue” (qtd. in Chambers 1994: 26). These samples provide a range of responses that are indicative of the flag’s capacity to act as an on-going reminder of the devastating effects of colonisation. In fact the scale and scope of reactions I have encountered during my research are far greater and more profound than I could have ever realised. I began this work with a sense of disquiet and anticipated that findings would, in general, be negative. As my research has progressed it has become evident that I had underestimated the intensity of reactions and responses. I have been taken aback by the pain, trauma and disdain which are evoked and provoked by the Australian national flag.

2014: Cloth on a stick

Colina Wymarra’s work, *Eyes of Innocence* (2014) was inspired by a story told by her father. The Gudang are seafaring people who regularly visit Bedanug (“Possession Island”, where Cook planted the British flag in 1770, as he sailed through the Torres Strait). On the beach one day the Gudang saw a ‘cloth on a stick’,

[In their innocence, my people’s innocence, they grabbed that and used it as a blanket and covering. ‘Flag’ was not a concept they knew of. I painted the traditional Gudang woman as she covered herself and her baby in that cloth because they didn’t know what that cloth was or what it meant or [has] come to mean centuries later (Wymarra qtd. in Osborne & Simpkin 2015: 174).]

In this work, the flag, a multi-coloured piece of calico, becomes a serviceable object that is used to provide comfort and warmth. Feelings of safety are evoked as the coloniser’s artefact is transformed into a blanket which seemingly nurtures as it provides shelter and protection. Colonial meanings of “flag” however, as Wymarra notes were, for her people, the very antithesis of comfort and warmth. The British land-claim-flag is anathema to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in that it signifies oppression, dispossession and violence. Under the auspices of this ‘blanket’ women were raped, babies and children murdered (Perkins and Croft 1994; Trudgen 2000: Chapter 1; Charola & Meakins 2016; Owen 2016). Wymarra demonstrates how inconceivable it is that the flag, which her people had innocently used as a blanket, could presume sovereignty over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands. Through Wymarra we also see the everyday implications of this cloth on a stick’s design. Nearly 250 years after the event, the flag of Australia represents a brutal yet living past that remains tightly interwoven with the political present. Graeme Gardner asserts,

[The Australian flag represents a takeover of another people. It’s a flag that represents part of Australia. It’s a flag that was brought over by another country to impose on people who lived here for 60,000 or more years before their involvement … [the Australian flag] represents the butcher’s apron. Why should we be proud with that hanging over our head … I think the current flag should be put away … (qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 23).]
**2013: Flag of Grief: Karla Dickens.**

In 2013 Karla Dickens won the New South Wales Parliament Aboriginal Art Prize with her entry: *Jan 26, Day of Mourning*. “Dickens’ art is a valuable invitation to better understand personal and national histories” (Brodie 2015: 69). Dickens sees Australia Day, the national day of celebration, as a day of profound grief,

> [T]he majority of Australia celebrates January 26 by wrapping themselves in the red, white and blue flag, having barbecues and feeling proud to be young and free … I cringe, stay close to dear friends, do all I can not to leave the house and respectfully hold my grief – the grief for the old, grief for the continuous denial, grief for the disrespect, grief for the lack of acknowledgment and the poor choice of the day to celebrate (Dickens qtd. in Taylor 2013: 16).

In an expression of her grief and as a way to draw attention to Australia’s ongoing race relations, Dickens transformed an old Australian flag which she had found at her local tip. She hand-stitched her grief onto the flag embellishing Australia’s most sacred national symbol with black crosses.

![Figure 28: Karla Dickens (2016) *Flag of Grief*. Vintage australia flag, thread, embroidered applique 280 x 124 cm.](image)
Dickens states that her reactions to 26 January are intensely personal and that she draws strength from her peers,

[contemporary artists who work to spotlight issues and humanity give me the confidence and pride to keep speaking up in non-violent protest. Standing shoulder to shoulder allows me the space for a safe connection, where growth and support open doors for change if possible, or acceptance in the lack thereof (Dickens qtd. in Martin-Chew 2015: 74).

Jan 26, *Day of Mourning* “pays homage to all the lives that have been lost and respect for all the people who are lost” (Dickens qtd. in Maxwell 2013: 15). I can count 82 black crosses, representing 82 lives lost, stitched onto the Federation star alone. Dickens notes that the defacement of the flag will be interpreted by some as provocative and she recognises that her message may be difficult for others to comprehend,

I think it’s going to be hard for people to separate the icon of the Australian flag from the message about Australia Day and what that means for most of Indigenous Australia (Dickens qtd. in Maxwell 2013: 15).

Australia Day and national flag are synonymous. As a result, those who get caught up in the red, white and blue celebration may fail to understand exactly what 26 January means for most Indigenous people.\(^{130}\) The amalgamation of national flag and national day is further conceptualised by Ali Gumillya Baker,

I remember the flag waving of Invasion Day and the young faces of invading white primitives drunkenly swaying, wrapped in the colonising flag. It is a frightening space for Aboriginal people. It is collective amnesia on a mass scale that is violent and possessive. It causes us Nungas\(^{131}\) to be invisible and visible all at once and without recognition of our sovereignty (qtd. in Wurm 2012: 6)

The concept of being both visible and invisible is powerful and well describes the violent effects of the sight of inebriated flag-waving white people. To be both seen and unseen on Australia Day marks both the hypervisibility of the flag, but also, as Baker notes, it is a stark

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\(^{130}\) A.B. Original’s song *January 26* was written to educate white Australians about Australia Day. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZ9qeX4gUeo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZ9qeX4gUeo) (A.B. Original 2016).

\(^{131}\) A term of self-identification used by some South Australian Aboriginal people.
reminder of the “collective amnesia” that obliterates over two hundred years of massacres, policies, and enduring practices of enforced assimilation. Warren Mundine states,

Indigenous people overwhelmingly feel anger, sadness and grief about the chain of events beginning on January 26, 1788. That was when our ancestors began losing their lands and their ability to speak their languages, practice ceremony and live under their kinship systems. And we, their descendants, lost our birthright (2017: 24).

For Dickens, Baker and Mundine 26 January is a day of grief and pain. Each year this day is framed as a national celebration, yet for Indigenous people in this country 26 January signifies genocide: it recalls white violence and dispossession and is augmented by a flag which reigns as a perpetual, hypervisible signal that invokes the brutality of colonial dispossession and its associated trauma. Similar to the flag, the ongoing maintenance of 26 January effectively upholds both the symbolic and real exclusion of Indigenous people.132 As Mundine explains,

[M]ost Indigenous people will never celebrate January 26. That doesn’t mean we won’t celebrate Australia. Quite the opposite … I want Australia Day moved – not because I don’t want to celebrate Australia, but because I do (2017: 24).

Accepting first prize, Dickens states,

[I]f my work was truly honouring the loss of lives, there would be no red, white and blue visible, the colour would have disappeared. All that would be seen would be black, a mass of hand-sewn black crosses (qtd. in Maxwell 2013: 15).

Here Dickens suggests that her embroidered black crosses fail to represent the scale of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander loss and also implies there can be no real justice until the red, the white and the blue have been expunged from the national symbol. As a final point Dickens draws attention to the flag-wavers who are imbued with double standards. She notes,

132 Since the time of writing several local councils have pushed for a new date to celebrate Australia Day. On 28 January 2017 Freemantle City Council in Western Australia held a culturally inclusive “Not Australia Day” event. Most recently, in Victoria, Melbourne’s Yarra and Darebin councils have also opted to ‘change the date’. The Commonwealth Government’s rebuke was swift, it decried the action of the councils and revoked their authority to hold Citizenship ceremonies.
… [I]t’s interesting that it’s all right for patriotic Aussies to take ownership of that flag and wrap themselves in it during riots and aggression, but when it comes to a blackfella having a voice about that same flag, it comes as a shock … (qtd. in Maxwell 2013: 15).

As noted throughout, for the colonising culture, flag, ownership and entitlement are synonymous. White people ‘rapt’ in their flag claim it as the sacrosanct symbol of nation; its status as everyday ‘banal’ object belies attention. White cultural ‘understandings’ of the flag emanate from complex relationships of power which have been constructed through the generations, ‘legitimised’ and endorsed by narratives, policy and practice that both privilege and normalise whiteness. The Australian flag is thus an investment, the incarnation of values and ideals that are central to hegemonic understandings of national identity. To protect the flag from dissent, Indigenous voices are kept silent. This is not an oversight, but a deliberate strategy of nation building and maintenance (Billig 2013). Through the medium of art Indigenous artists stridently re-script Australia’s hegemonic narratives, “[W]e are cultural activists and we state our cultural beliefs and position as indivisible from our political beliefs and position – always have, always will” (Perkins and Croft 1994: 15). This affirmation of resistance persists, and moving through the twenty first century Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists:

will continue to look to the past, to their ancestral or cultural teachings or histories, to inform their present thoughts. Whether inspirational, informative or heartbreaking, their works open up and encourage conversations that are essential to dispel myths, stereotypes and outdated ideologies (Baum 2017: 19).
Dis-Mantling the Symbol of Invasion and Oppression

The final section of this chapter discusses some Indigenous perspectives which relate to a new flag built on the premise of inclusion. As noted in Chapter Two, a 1994 survey found that Aboriginal people were united in their calls for the removal of the Union Jack (Foley 1996a). These demands remain strident,

[W]ith the British Union Jack as part of the current flag it represents the European invasion of the land as far as Indigenous Australians are concerned. Indigenous leaders almost universally believe if there is ever to be true acceptance of the history and heritage of Indigenous Australia there has to be a new flag that features the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures (Stephen Hagan qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 22).

Hagan states that a new national flag which incorporates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures would indicate that the nation finally accepts and recognises Indigenous history and cultures. Justin Mohamed asserts,

I think the change needs to come … We need to have something there that represents all of us. I think Australia needs to recognise and have things that recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 24).

The Mayor of Palm Island, Alf Lacy, notes the longstanding nature of the Australian flag debate and argues that it’s time to foreground a discussion about a new Australian flag that includes Indigenous perspectives. Lacy supports embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander symbols into a new Australian flag however his primary concern is that of inclusion, “we need to make sure we get recognised somewhere in the flag debate in this country” (qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 22). Elverina Johnson contends,

I think the flag should include whatever they need to include, whether it be the colours of the Indigenous people, the Aboriginal flag, but anything that will represent and speak out loud about the Indigenous people of Australia and make it inclusive of who we are here and that we exist (qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 23).

Palm Island is one of a group of sixteen islands located 65kms north of Townsville, Queensland. In 1914 Palm Island was gazetted as an Aboriginal reserve. From 1918, and for the next fifty years Aboriginal people from around Queensland who were deemed “uncompliant” according to the draconian laws of the colonial state were incarcerated on Palm Island (Langton & Loos 2008).
Torres Strait Island Regional Mayor, Fred Gela states Australia’s flag ought not to be monocultural,

we need something that can truly reflect the various cultures, the oldest true living cultures and race that sets Australia apart from any other country which is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people … I think that is a debate in itself and it needs to happen (Gela qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 23).

Gela’s claim that discussion about the flag is important in its own right is noteworthy. Postponing the debate to ‘when Australia becomes a republic’ for example, or employing excuses such as ‘when the Queen dies’ are strategies designed to obstruct such calls. Dissenting voices are subsumed into bureaucratic discourse and power: the ‘special’ status of nation-as-white-possession is reinforced. According to Graeme Gardner,

[I]t is a new era now. There is a need to represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and that must be first and foremost, and whether anything else is put on there is a matter for the people. But I think the flag needs to be based on the original people of this land (qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 23).

Graeme Mundine notes the importance of an on-going new flag discussion,

… because we need to develop what it is to be Australian, and it’s obvious … a lot of people, not just Aboriginal people, don’t see it representing who we are as a nation” (qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 23).

Jason King claims, “[W]e need a new symbol for Australia. Even if it is in the colours used it needs to represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people” (qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 24).

Lisa Jackson-Pulver argues for a flag, whose redesign is premised on inclusion,

it’s time we had a serious discussion about a new national flag … it’s not inclusive because it is not including us. It is only acknowledging one small slice of history, a tiny little slice of history … I think we need to design a flag as a country that belongs to us all, and we can all stand there hand on chest and say, I believe (qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 25).

Consultation and collaboration with Indigenous people are central tenets for both Marianne Mackay and Richard Downs,
what needs to be done is that it’s a consultative process where everyone around Australia is involved and we come together as a nation to create a whole new flag that truly does represent the nation, not one that represents the history of the oppression of the Indigenous people (Mackay qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 25).

I think changing the flag is going to happen. We have to go down that pathway. All Indigenous leaders and people throughout this country here will have to come up with a design or proposal. We will need to play a major part of the whole design and how the flag will look (Downs qtd. in Bagnall 2012: 27).

Conclusion

This chapter has provided evidence regarding the associated meanings of the Australian national flag for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A broad-spectrum of responses indicate that for many Indigenous people the Australian flag in its current formation is both a source of anxiety and sadness and, it can be argued, a direct contributor to on-going health issues. Some twenty years ago, on the other side of the world, Aboriginal artists voiced their disdain for the national flag. While in Australia, at around the same time, despite overwhelming evidence calling for the removal of the Union Jack, Foley notes that the findings of her survey while useful could not be considered as indicative of the wider Aboriginal community. As stated, the breadth of reaction to the flag by Indigenous people has been overwhelming and it leads me to consider the wider sociological implications associated with the nation’s flag being understood by so many as a “nightmare”. According to the responses in this chapter, the emotions transmitted through the presence of the Australian flag are profound; they include rage, outrage, depression, grief and sorrow. The evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates that the flag, as an ever present effigy of genocide for many that manifests in all spheres of social and cultural activity constitutes a site of perpetual distress for many Indigenous people.
CONCLUSIONS: The Australian National Flag: A Re-View

...take some time to think about the Aboriginal people who have had these jewels of life taken from them in the short history of our nation. I say this not to condemn your forebears, or yourselves, but to merely to state the truth. Even today the truth is hard to bear, such is the loss suffered by so many Aboriginal people, continuing to this day. The truth may help you understand your own life better and allow you to be a contributor to the challenges that lie ahead in making a settlement between our people within the nation.

(Galarrwuy Yunupingu qtd. in Koori Mail 10 August 2016: 4).

Nations are not static and this is a time of national and global tension where borders are anxiously maintained by fleets and forces bearing national flags. The instability of nation states continues to be countered by emerging new forms of nationalism that decree who and what ‘we’ are and in turn, what constitutes ‘Australian-ness’. The flag plays a pivotal role in this discourse. For many non-Indigenous Australians, the banality of the flag with its colonial imprimatur will serve well these new nationalistic forces. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people however, the flag will continue to serve as a reminder of the loss of sovereignty and the violence that continues to accompany colonial rule. As the nation’s most powerful symbol, the Australian national flag,

symbolises a narrow slice of our history including a significant period when the rights of Australia’s indigenous peoples were overlooked. For this reason, most of Australia’s indigenous people cannot relate to the existing flag. For us, it symbolises dispossession and oppression (Lowitja O’Donoghue qtd. in Ausflag 2013).

This thesis has demonstrated both the force and the fragility of the national flag, and by extension, the nation itself. From the outset of my inquiry, it became increasingly evident that a rigorous exploration of the flag’s dominant significations would provide the space required to identify other contexts and narratives. The thesis has considered the multitudinous ways in which the national flag signifies as a colonial emblem, and also, how this signification has
become “banal”, unremarkable, and naturalised to the extent that by and large the flag remains an unquestioned symbol, seamlessly embedded into the national landscape.

This work began as an enquiry relating to the national flag’s representational force and its influence in the reproduction of national identity. My primary questions were how the flag makes meaning – or makes meaningful – the articulations of nation through its symbolism and, in particular, I was interested in how the flag is received and understood by Indigenous people. My research has been shaped by my migrant and life experience, and in particular was influenced by my return to education. As an adult female scholar I learnt how to critically reflect on the process of my migrant experience and was able to focus my attention on various questions, such as: “what is the flag of my birthplace doing here?” “How can this still be in the twenty first century?”

Prior to commencing this work I had experienced increasing unease at every encounter with the national flag, a disquiet I was often at odds with as I noticed the flag flying almost everywhere in the public domain, in workplaces, and institutions. For me, the very presence of the flag became noticeable, remarkable, and worthy of exploration, a source of keen interest and indeed, concern, as my questions kept recurring. As I learned more about Australia’s colonial history, I wondered what the Union Jack might represent to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. How did the Union Jack signify? Could the flag have a negative impact on health and wellbeing? Is the flag yet another reminder of the on-going consequences of colonisation? Or can such questions be construed as assumption based on how I imagine the significatory potential of the flag? This investigation was generated by these queries which refused to abate: they demanded answers. Over time, the simplicity of my questions revealed a complexity of discursive forces. It seemed to me that the omnipresence and omnipotence of the flag worked to construct national allegiance because of its “banal” acceptance. If, as my research demonstrated, the construction of Australian national identity is forged through such
powerful symbolism as a flag with the Union Jack in its canton, how then does this function for Indigenous people? Reflecting on my desire for answers, I have learned that my analysis of the Australian flag and its attendant and powerful symbolism for Australia as a nation state tends to provoke more questions than answers. However, what is disclosed in this work is the complex web of discourses that continues to produce and reproduce nation through the flag’s ubiquity and the sacrosanct status afforded to white history, white traditions and white sentiment.

In order to provide a comprehensive review of the flag’s potential as a signifier, it was necessary to commence this investigation by tracing the construction of the modern nation and then progress to its maintenance. Chapter Three grounds the thesis in theories of nation creation and from this it emerges that the nation is both a discursive formation and an ideological construct which resides in the minds of its people as a “banal” materiality that is routinely accepted as natural. The true power of the nation, however, lies with its maintenance—without nationalism’s repetitive rites and rituals, the fragile concept of nation is compromised. In view of this, Chapter Four discusses the various ways in which the Australian nation is maintained. Australian nationalism is constructed and endorsed through various discourses and symbols which collaborate to mark and re-imagine the landscape as a white possession.

Chapter Five investigates flags as material objects that signify in multitudinous ways. To facilitate my interrogation of the Australian national flag I have drawn from work in Australian Indigenous Studies, Critical Whiteness Studies, Vexillology and History. This multidisciplinary approach has allowed me to consider more broadly the implications of the national flag’s history and symbolism. As the Australian nation was constructed, so too was its flag and this thesis has highlighted how the racialised symbolic properties of the national symbol work to sustain a hegemonic, white-Australian national identity. Accordingly, the discursive framings of both flag and nation continue to perpetuate Anglo-centric perspectives.
The flag as the primary symbol of the Australian nation continues to dominate the imagi-nation and to promote the benefits of colonial traditions that sanction the perceived superiority of ‘our’ way of life, ‘our’ laws, and ‘our’ values.

Throughout the thesis I have presented accounts of Indigenous resistance to the colonial project. These counter-narratives challenge dominant discourses of nation by exposing their fragility and their need for continual reinforcement; thus they make available spaces for intervention. In addition, the counter-narratives presented in this work demonstrate that despite insurmountable odds, the world’s oldest living culture has survived. Chapter Six presents research that examines resistance, and as such, underpins the final chapter. The responses and reactions to the national flag by Indigenous people comprises research that must be contextualised not as isolated incidents, but as expressions which are firmly grounded in nearly two hundred and fifty years of oppression.

In exploring the discursive conditions that construct nation through the Australian national flag, my study has both responded to some of my initial questions while generating the potential for further inquiry. Early in this work I noted that there appeared to be a paucity of Indigenous perspectives to be found about the Australian flag in the literature. This gap however, was unexpectedly supplemented and enriched through the work of Indigenous artists whose perspectives have made a valuable contribution. To this end, the thesis has re-viewed the flag, and in so doing has made a small contribution to the extant scholarly knowledge that serves as critique. The consequences of flying an identity-exclusive national flag are yet to be fully realised as are the opportunities for further research which present in light of this work. I see many possibilities that will extend the capabilities of this literature based study including field-work and interviews.
This work provides a solid foundation from which to undertake post-doctoral work, further research will continue to reveal the pedagogical influence that the flag has on social cohesion and most importantly on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In the discussion stages of my PhD it was suggested that I investigate what the Aboriginal flag represents to white Australians. This was, and is indeed an important proposal which warrants further investigation. To determine how informed white Australia is about the significations of the Aboriginal flag and what they ‘feel’ when they see it flying, or on clothing has a significant role to play in further understanding the socio-political force of Australian nationalism. Out of these conversations different understandings and ways of ‘knowing’ the flag may be generated. This in turn, will contribute to a shift in the discursive terrain which surrounds the Australian flag and its affiliated nation.

As this research suggests, national flags are inextricably bound to the rise of the nation state and these emblems ‘wave’ to their citizens in ways that are not always apparent. For white Australia, flags serve a very particular purpose whereby the violence of colonial imposition can be overlaid and ‘forgotten’ by the fabric of a ‘new nation’ whose flags fly in their thousands to augment the necessary amnesia of nation building. This study also finds that there is a disconcerting duality wrapped up in the threads of nation which permits the Union Jack residency as point of honour. There is meaning attached to the Australian flag which goes beyond symbolism and the seemingly ‘straightforward’ understandings of what the national flag signifies in relation to history, sentiment and tradition. In light of this, I contend that a more inclusive and robust Australian national identity lies somewhere between the flags and waits to be ‘re-imagined’ in a flag which flies in the wind for all of its people.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A

ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from ‘time immemorial’, and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or ‘mother nature’, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. 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?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia’s nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are aliened from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness.

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future (Referendum Council 2017b).
Appendix B

*Why should I acknowledge the Union Jack?* (Minungka McInerney qtd. in *Koori Mail* 23 August 2017: 23).
POETRY

Why should I acknowledge the Union Jack?

As an Aboriginal person, why should I be proud of the Union Jack?
It represents what we despire, of never getting our country back.
My people were first massacred, in the frontier wars.
From the day the British set foot, on our shores.
The British proclaimed Aboriginal Australia, as Terra Nullus land,
To legitimise their theft, from the highest command.
The lucky country they say, only lucky for some.
Our tribulations stem from many losing their Mum.
Our land, our culture, our sense of worth.
Destined for a life of despair, from the day of birth.
Gathered up like sheep, that's all the British saw us for.
Dispossessed of our lands, and forced into locked doors.
In shabby mission houses, with Christian Crosses everywhere.
If Jesus was watching, he would have had tears running down his face with despair.
Don't speak your language, forget about your mob.
Here is a bucket, scrubbing the floors is your job.
Taught the white people's ways, how to talk and speak.
Comply with the white people, don't say a word, not a peep.
Walk into town, "What's this 'Abo' doing here?"
"Sorry we don't serve 'Aobs' at the bar. Did I make myself clear?"
Feeling ostracised, dehumanised, in isolation.
Living in your own country, but treated like scum with discrimination.
Where do we fit in, taught from British indoctrination?
If it wasn't for coloured skin, there would be acceptance from assimilation.
Fast forwarding to the present, from generations gone by.
Treating Aboriginal boys like animals, in the youth justice system, we ask why?
From ancestors in shackles, to young boys at Don Dale.
To prison cells across the nation, our system always fails.
Deaths in custody, lack of duty of care.
Just another number and statistic, so many are unaware.
Institutionalised racism, does not make it in the media.
Sensationalising and demonising my people, just to make their criteria.
Elijah Doughty, an innocent Western Australian Aboriginal boy.
Striped away of his innocent life, to live a life with joy.
Accused of stealing a motorbike, murdered in the first degree.
But white privilege for the murderer, up for manslaughter, with no guilty plea.
My Aboriginal people have been murdered, assimilated, handcuffed and shackled.
Been trodden, belittled, dismantled and tackled.
By the land of the free, but only free for some.
It's a hard life: born in the first world, but living in a slum.

Munungga 'Nookay' McInerney
Tandanyangga Adelaide, SA.
From the Yankunytjatjara nation.

Appendix C

‘Up the Country’ was published 9 July 1892 and Lawson’s understandings of the bush are explicit:

Land where gaunt and haggard women live alone and work like men,
Till their husbands, gone a-droving, will return to them again:
Homes of men! if home had ever such a God-forgotten place,
Where the wild selector’s children fly before a stranger’s face.
Home of tragedy applauded by the dingoes’ dismal yell,
Heaven of the shanty-keeper – fitting fiend for such a hell –
And the wallaroos and wombats, and, of course, the curlew’s call –
And the lone sundowner tramping ever onward through it all!


Paterson’s response, ‘In Defence of the Bush’ was published 23 July 1892:

… you found the bush was dismal and a land of no delight,
Did you chance to hear a chorus in the shearsers’ huts at night?
Did they ‘rise up, William Riley’ by the camp-fire’s cheery blaze?
Did they rise him as we rose him in the good old droving days?
And the women of the homesteads and the men you chanced to meet –
Were their faces sour and saddened like the ‘faces in the street’,
And the ‘shy selector children’ – were they better now or worse
Than the little city urchins who would greet you with a curse?
Is not such a life much better than the squalid street and square
Where the fallen women flaunt it in the fierce electric glare,
Where the sempstress plies her sewing till her eyes are sore and red
In a filthy, dirty attic toiling on for daily bread?

Did you hear no sweeter voices in the music of the bush
Than the roar of trams and buses, and the war-whoop of ‘the push’?
Did the magpies rouse your slumbers with their carol sweet and strange?
Did you hear the silver chiming of the bell-birds on the range?
But, perchance, the wild birds’ music by your senses was despised,
For you say you'll stay in townships till the bush is civilised.
Would you make it a tea-garden and on Sundays have a band
Where the ‘blokes’ might take their ‘donahs’, with a ‘public’ close at hand?
You had better stick to Sydney and make merry with the ‘push’,
For the bush will never suit you, and you’ll never suit the bush

(Paterson & Baglin 1988: 30).
Appendix D

On National Flag Day 2000, former Governor General of Australia, Archbishop Peter Hollingworth delivered a eulogy to the Australian national flag.

The Australian National Flag Prayer

Almighty and most merciful God,
the sovereign lord of all nations;
we give you thanks for this our flag,
the symbol of our nationhood,
which we raise this day.
We thank you for the abundant blessings
you have bestowed upon us,
for our heritage expressed in three crosses
of St George, St Andrew and St Patrick,
for the Southern Cross set in azure skies,
the symbol of the land where we live today,
and for the Federal star,
the symbol of the Commonwealth of Australia.
Finally we give thanks for the blessings of cultural diversity,
For though we are many people, yet we are one nation,
With one destiny under your good providence,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen (qtd. in ANFA 2012c).
Appendix E

The Burnum Burnum Declaration: England, 26th January 1988

I Burnum Burnum, being a nobleman of ancient Australia do hereby take possession of England on behalf of the Aboriginal People.

In claiming this colonial outpost, we wish no harm to you natives, but assure you that we are here to bring you good manners, refinement and an opportunity to make a Koopartoo – ‘a fresh start’.

Henceforth, an Aboriginal face shall appear on your coins and stamps to signify our sovereignty over this domain.

For the more advanced, we bring the complex language of the Pitjantjajara; we will teach you how to have a spiritual relationship with the Earth and show you how to get bush tucker.

We do not intend to souvenir, pickle and preserve the heads of 2000 of your people, nor to publicly display the skeletal remains of your Royal Highness, as was done to our Queen Truganinni for 80 years. Neither do we intend to poison your waterholes, lace your flour with strychnine or introduce you to highly toxic drugs.

Based on our 50,000 year heritage, we acknowledge the need to preserve the Caucasian race as of interest to antiquity, although we may be inclined to conduct experiments by measuring the size of your skulls for levels of intelligence. We pledge not to sterilize your women, not to separate your children from their families.

We give an absolute undertaking that you shall not be placed into the mentality of government handouts for the next five generations but you will enjoy the full benefits of Aboriginal equality.

At the end of two hundred years, we will make a Treaty to validate occupation by peaceful means and not by conquest.

Finally, we solemnly promise not to make a quarry of England and export your valuable minerals back to the old country Australia, and we vow never to destroy three-quarters of your trees, but to encourage Earth Repair Action to unite people, communities, religions and nations in a common, productive, peaceful purpose.

Burnum Burnum (qtd. in Norst 1999: 2).