

ABORIGINAL HISTORY

Volume forty-six 2022

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Since 1977 the peer-reviewed annual journal *Aboriginal History* has pioneered interdisciplinary historical studies of Australian Aboriginal peoples' and Torres Strait Islander's interactions with non-Indigenous peoples, principally in Australia but also transnationally. It promotes publication of Indigenous oral traditions, biographies, narratives in local languages, archival and bibliographic guides, previously unpublished manuscript accounts, critiques of current events, and research and reviews in the cognate fields of anthropology, archaeology, sociology, linguistics, demography, law, geography and cultural, political and economic history. For more information, please visit aboriginalhistory.org.au.

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Preface

Ben Silverstein and Crystal McKinnon

Some five years ago, when 250 First Peoples' delegates from around Australia met at Uluru to discuss proposals for the constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, they acknowledged the importance of recognising the truth about the past. They did so in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, signed by most but not all of those delegates, which calls for a process of 'truth-telling about our history' that would provide the basis for a 'fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia'.¹ In so doing, they were responding to the insistence of participants in the 2016–17 First Nations Regional Dialogues that 'people need to know more about Australian and Aboriginal history'.² Though calls for true histories have been heard across a range of forums for decades at least, these dialogues and the Uluru Statement have given them a new impetus. We are now seeing the fruits of these moments in both scholarly research and public institutions.

For many, this means an intent focus on telling the truth about colonial violence, and publicly recording wars, killings and massacres. The Yoorrook Justice Commission, established in Victoria in May 2021, has the broad purview of examining 'all historic and ongoing injustices perpetrated by state and non-state entities against First Peoples [in Victoria] since the start of colonisation', a beginning dated to 1788.³ And across a series of works, writers and others have represented the imperative of truth-telling as a compelling demand to remember processes of invasion and genocide, of frontier wars and massacres. Rachel Perkins introduces her recent SBS miniseries *The Australian Wars* by asking whether 'we [are] ready to honestly face the

1 'The Uluru Statement from the Heart', 2017, The Uluru Dialogue, accessed 1 December 2022, ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement/.

2 Davis and Williams, *Everything You Need to Know about the Uluru Statement from the Heart*, 166.

3 Yoorrook Justice Commission, *Yoorrook with Purpose*, 5, 95. See also Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, *Final Report*, 32.

past that made our country what it is, or go on living a lie'. The centrality of what Henry Reynolds terms the 'killing times' and its legal and national implications are entrenched at the heart of these true histories.⁴

Many of the most powerful instances of truth-telling may begin with, but exceed, colonisation and the violence that makes it. The Referendum Council, a body appointed by the Australian Government to work towards constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, here provides one small example: in its final report it included a synthesis it named 'Our Story', which commences with a description of First Law and traces its endurance through the violation of British colonisation. As it emphasises, it is from this First Law that First Peoples' sovereignties are derived.⁵ And, as many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people identify, the 'true history of ... colonisation' is ongoing and present. The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria has argued, for instance, that it is critical that institutional approaches to truth-telling acknowledge that ongoing 'lived experiences of colonisation are no less painful than stories of frontier wars'. For First Peoples, they wrote, 'the links between massacres, exile from Country, stolen generations and deaths in custody today are self-evident and do not fall neatly into separate categories of historic systemic injustice and ongoing systemic injustice'.⁶

Both these aspects of truth-telling – the ongoing history of colonisation and the need to exceed it – recall the message of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, established on Ngunnawal–Ngambri Country 50 years ago, which its founders framed as a response to the government treating Aboriginal people as 'aliens in our own land'.⁷ In the immediate context, this was a response to a government declaration of opposition to land rights and renewed commitment to an assimilation policy. But more broadly the embassy insisted – through its very political form as well as through the words of participants – on enacting underlying and enduring Aboriginal sovereignties. These sovereignties are not effects of colonisation; they are embodied relationships between people, Country and First Law. In performing sovereignties, and in providing the scene in which the settler colonial state rejected their political cogency, the Tent Embassy dramatised a fundamental and ongoing antagonism at the heart of Australian history. This conflict, so carefully and effectively made apparent by the embassy, continues to structure relationships in this place. Aileen Moreton-Robinson has urged scholars to think about 'Indigenous sovereignty and its relation to state sovereignty as relations of force'; the terrain of sovereignty in Australia is a terrain of war.⁸ This truth has a place in the kinds of historical truth-telling that might lead to the effective social change upon which its proponents insist.⁹ It reminds us of the ongoing and fundamentally unresolved problem of conflicting sovereignties whose relationship cannot be neatly resolved.

4 Perkins, 'Episode 1'; Reynolds, *Truth-Telling*, 194. See also, for example, McKenna, *Return to Uluru*; Ashenden, *Telling Tennant's Story*.

5 Joint Select Committee, *Final Report*, 16–21.

6 First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, 'Tyerri Yoo-rrook' (*Seed of Truth*), 17, 32.

7 Foley, 'The Australian Labor Party and the Native Title Act', 122–23.

8 Moreton-Robinson, 'Toward a New Research Agenda', 131.

9 See, for example, Davis, 'Speaking Up', 30.

The articles in this volume each take up the challenge of historical truth-telling in provocative and generative ways. Aunty Doris Paton, Beth Marsden and Jessica Horton trace the memorialisation of Angus McMillan, a Gippsland squatter who led a series of massacres of Aboriginal people in the mid-nineteenth century. Paton, Marsden and Horton describe the installation of memorial cairns in the 1920s and their shifting meaning through the twentieth century, before turning to the Gunai Kurnai-led contestation of their continued presence in 2020. Through examining the disputed terrain of truth and justice in Gippsland in the context of Black Lives Matter, they show us how some ways of memorialising the frontier can act as a colonising practice of securing territorial possession. Against these settler claims that seek to dispossess Indigenous peoples, Gunai Kurnai communities endure and survive, covering colonising memory with sovereign counter-narratives.

In describing campaigns to repatriate Ancestors' stolen remains, Heidi Norman and Anne Maree Payne link movements for return with Aboriginal nation-building over the past 50 years. The rising momentum towards the repatriation of Ancestral Remains from collecting institutions across Europe and North America mirrored the rising power of Aboriginal land rights and self-determination movements; the two, Norman and Payne show, were connected. Repatriation presents Aboriginal people with opportunities to articulate publicly relationships with Ancestors as family rather than as objects of scientific or museological value, embedding contemporary nation-building efforts in the solidity of historical truth-telling. Their call for these relationships with the past to be represented in a National Resting Place is central to this argument. Rob Hudson and Shannon Woodcock return us to Gunai Kurnai Country to show us how one such Keeping Place has worked over the past 50 years to foster cultural resurgence. Presenting a valuable reflection on methods of collaborative research, Hudson and Woodcock's exemplary approach demonstrates the force of a history shaped by the narrative of the Keeping Place, one based in Elders' knowledge, emphasising the value of historical truth-telling for community wellbeing.

We are pleased to include an edited version of the History Council of New South Wales' 2021 Annual History Lecture, a conversation between Laura McBride and Mariko Smith. McBride and Smith are co-curators of the Australian Museum's *Unsettled* exhibition, through which they responded to the 250th anniversary of Cook's *Endeavour* voyage along Australia's east coast by telling true stories that put Cook in his place. Working closely with community through extensive consultation, the exhibition takes seriously the stories and emphases that circulate among First Peoples' communities yet are so often absent or marginal in public spaces. In this conversation, they take us through the process of producing true histories that reflect community memories as well as survival, resistance and healing today.

Through these articles and the accompanying reviews, we hope this volume responds to the demands of the present moment. We thank the Aboriginal History editorial board, especially book reviews editor Annemarie McLaren and copyeditor Geoff

Hunt, and the ANU Press team for all their work throughout 2022. We also thank the many anonymous referees who generously gave their time and expertise to reviewing articles this year. Lastly, we would like to recognise the many contributions of outgoing chair of Aboriginal History Maria Nugent, under whose stewardship the journal and monograph series have thrived. Maria's generosity and astute editorial judgment have been invaluable in our time as editors, and we thank her for her advice and guidance. We welcome the new chair, John Maynard, with whom we look forward to working closely to reimagine the scope and possibilities of *Aboriginal History* over the coming years.

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Contributors

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Rob Hudson is a Kurnai Monero Ngarigo man and the cultural manager of the Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place. He has been raised in the knowledge of and worked for decades with cultural heritage. He was a research fellow at the State Library of Victoria (2019–21) and co-authored *Self-Determined First Nations Museums and Colonial Contestation: The Keeping Place* (Routledge, 2022).

Dr Beth Marsden is a white settler historian living and working on Wurundjeri Country. She is a research fellow at La Trobe University and the University of Melbourne. Her research interests include First Nations histories, especially education and political activism, and critical archival methodologies.

Laura McBride is a Wailwan and Kooma woman and director, First Nations, at the Australian Museum. Laura leads the First Nations strategic direction and operations as well as the museum's extensive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and archaeology collections, and Pasifika cultural collections. Laura's vision centres on prioritising and amplifying First Nations voices so that First Nations communities represent themselves and their cultures within the museum. Laura's academic qualifications include a Bachelor of Arts (University of Sydney) conferred in 2008 (double major in psychology and Australian Indigenous studies), and Master of Aboriginal Education (University of Technology Sydney) conferred in 2012.

Dr Crystal McKinnon is an Amangu Yamatji academic and community organiser who lives and works on Kulin Nation Country. She is an associate professor in history, law and justice at the University of Melbourne. Her research work has looked at Indigenous histories and politics, with particular interest in sovereignty, law and justice, political activism, resistance and social movements. She is a member of the Warriors of Aboriginal Resistance (WAR Victoria), and is a board member of Pay

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Professor Heidi Norman is an associate dean (Indigenous) in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at University of Technology Sydney and a descendant of the Gomeroi people from north-western New South Wales. Her research has included a history of the NSW Annual Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout, the social and economic impact of mining in relation to Gomeroi lands, and a study of economic change over time and its relationship to Aboriginal lives in cities. In 2015, she published her book *What Do We Want? A Political History of Aboriginal Land Rights in NSW*, the first-ever study of land rights in NSW.

Dr Aunty Doris Paton is a Gunai Elder and educator living and working in Gippsland, Victoria. Doris Paton has a PhD in philosophy (education), a Master of Education (Aboriginal education), a Graduate Diploma of Education (secondary) and a Bachelor of Arts (social science). Doris is chair of CEAHEG, the Centre of Excellence for Aboriginal Health in East Gippsland Ltd, an organisation of Elders and community members working to promote health careers to Aboriginal young people in East Gippsland. Doris's role in reclamation and revival of Aboriginal languages includes office bearer for the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages; Woolum Bellum (KODE) School in the development of the 'Nambur Ganai' CD; curriculum development and assessment framework for the Victorian Qualifications Authority and Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority-accredited 'Indigenous Languages of Victoria'; and executive roles on the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Corporation of Languages, focused on the protection and preservation of Indigenous languages and cultures across Australia.

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Dr Ben Silverstein is a postdoctoral research fellow in history and lecturer in Indigenous studies at The Australian National University. He has researched in colonial and Indigenous histories, engaging questions of race and settler colonialism as well as contests over sovereignties and colonial government. He is currently working in the Research Centre for Deep History, on Ngannawal and Ngambri Country.

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and history. Mariko specialises in Aboriginal cultural heritage, community-based cultural resurgence projects, and incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing into museum and artistic practices. She has a PhD from the University of Sydney (Department of Sociology and Social Policy) about the cultural resurgence of Aboriginal tied-bark canoe making in south-eastern Aboriginal communities.

Dr Shannon Woodcock is a white historian specialising in violence and genocide studies. They have lived on Gunai Kurnai Country since 2017, working under the direction of Rob Hudson at the Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place. They co-authored *Self-Determined First Nations Museums and Colonial Contestation: The Keeping Place* (Routledge, 2022) and currently work for the Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity academic program at the University of Melbourne.

Articles

‘No time for a history lesson’: The contest over memorials to Angus McMillan on Gunaikurnai Country

Aunty Doris Paton, Beth Marsden and Jessica Horton

Abstract: In Australia, calls for the removal of memorials to white colonists escalated during 2020, as the international Black Lives Matter movement influenced growing demands for a more open reckoning with Australian’s past to be reflected in public history. In June 2020, the Wellington Shire Council in Gippsland, Victoria, rejected a motion supported by Traditional Owners, the Gunaikurnai, to remove monuments built to commemorate the ‘explorer’ and instigator of massacres, Angus McMillan. Those who voted against the removals claimed that the cairns are educative and historically accurate. In this article, we argue that the value and intent of the cairns to McMillan have been contested since their inception, and therefore subject to revision and re-storying. We analyse the campaign behind the erection of the cairns in the 1920s and demonstrate that this public history project was informed by the white supremacist politics of the time, and that the political project of colonial erasure continues to be enacted in more recent public debates over McMillan’s memorialisation. We draw connections between the settler colonial politics of the 1920s and the 2020 contest over the cairns at a community level, highlighting the strength of colonial narratives of possession. This article demonstrates how First Nations–led public pedagogies provide a way forward that allows for collaborative, community-based rescripting of McMillan’s position in public history.



Figure 1: The cairn to McMillan in Stratford, March 2020.

Source: Reproduced with permission of Beth Ripper, Wellington Reconciliation Group.

Thindu wurk-wurk githa – This land is mine. Thindu wallung githa – These rocks are mine.¹

On 16 June 2020, the Wellington Shire Council (WSC), located in Gippsland, Victoria, voted on a proposal to remove two stone cairns built in dedication to Angus McMillan. McMillan, a Scot who migrated to Australia in 1838, was one of the men who paved the way for the European invasion of Gunaikurnai Country. He is known by some as a murderer, leader of massacres and the 'butcher of Gippsland', and by others as an explorer, a pioneer and a 'founding father'. The proposal to the WSC, made by Councillor Carolyn Crossley, was to remove two cairns located on council land, and to begin consultations for the removal of seven other cairns on land owned by government agencies.² Dr Aunty Doris Paton, a Gunai Elder and educator, was among the 239 locals who made submissions to the council preceding the vote. Aunty Doris asked the councillors:

to be courageous for our Ancestors, for our Elders, and for our future generations. The impact of colonialism on our lives over the generations has been profound, our stories need to be told. To heal.

For Aunty Doris, the council vote was 'an opportunity for the Wellington Shire Councillors to be on the right side of history'. Most councillors, however, were not courageous and voted five to four against the proposal. This was the same week that the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protestors in Bristol, United Kingdom, dragged a bronze statue of the slave trader Edward Colston into the harbour.³ Opponents of the proposal claimed that the global context precipitated a rushed proposal, ignoring the long-term community campaign led by Gunaikurnai to address the representation of history on their Country, particularly the dominance of McMillan.⁴

Across Gunaikurnai Country, 18 cairns purportedly chart the route taken by McMillan in 1840.⁵ Many are located along pathways and near to cultural places important to Gunaikurnai people long before McMillan arrived.⁶ For Gunaikurnai people, the two cairns subject to the WSC vote, located on the highway in Sale and Stratford, are daily reminders of McMillan's violence.⁷ They were built in 1926 at the initiative of the Victorian Historical Memorials Committee, a group of men from Melbourne without any connection to McMillan. The political context for the erection of the cairns, some 85 years after McMillan's journey through Gippsland, is often overlooked in contemporary debates. By recontextualising the campaign to

1 Steaphan Paton, 'Wallung Githa Unsettled', Anna Pappas Gallery, accessed 18 August 2021, www.annapappasgallery.com/; Paton and Cope, *Wallung Githa Unsettled*.

2 Wellington Shire Council (WSC) Minutes 16 June 2020.

3 Moody, 'Off the Pedestal: The Fall of Edward Colston'.

4 WSC Minutes 16 June 2020.

5 There are also obelisks and plinth monuments to McMillan across the region. See Monument Australia, 'Search', accessed 4 June 2021, monumentaustralia.org.au/search. On the erection of the cairns, see Paterson, 'History in Stone'.

6 Aunty Doris Paton, Gunai cultural knowledge.

7 WSC Minutes 16 June 2020.

build the McMillan cairns and considering how they were intended to contribute to narratives of settler legitimacy throughout the twentieth century, we shed light on the contemporary debate, including the WSC vote. Just as the erection of the cairns was a form of history making in the 1920s, we argue that the process of removing the cairns is also a form of making (and reckoning with) history that is already underway, driven by the grassroots efforts of Gunaikurnai people and organisations.

This article is a collaboration between Aunty Doris Paton and settler historians Beth Marsden and Jessica Horton. We came to write on this issue through several intersections: our ongoing research relationships, the gathering community momentum to face Gippsland's history and the continuing campaign to remove the McMillan cairns. Recently, Amangu Yamatji academic Crystal McKinnon argued that historians 'need to listen to community directed articulations of injustice, and of what justice looks like – which means to reorient to the present as our starting point'.⁸ The ongoing fight over the cairns is our starting point, and we aim to address the need for history to be told through the present justice objectives of those who are harmed by both the debate and the continuing presence of the cairns on Gunaikurnai Country. Through a collaborative methodology and community engagement, and by centring Gunaikurnai knowledge and authority, settler historians Marsden and Horton are attempting to overcome what Katherine Ellinghaus and Barry Judd refer to as the 'disciplinary decadence' of academic history by using their skills to work for these objectives.⁹ We draw attention to the continuities between the historical and contemporary role of the cairns in upholding settler narratives of possession within the landscape. We interrogate the role of the cairns as part of the public history objectives of some in settler society that aimed to bolster settler narratives of pride in pioneers throughout the twentieth century. In the process, we emphasise the continuity of settler investment in celebrating explorers and pioneers, such as McMillan, and draw attention to the long-term counter campaign of Gunaikurnai to remove the cairns as another form of First Nations-directed public history.¹⁰

Public history, memorialisation and white possession in Gippsland

Scholarship on the role of racial power in the making of settler colonial space orients our investigation of the historical and contemporary impacts of the cairns. Numerous scholars have examined the inscription of the landscape with names and monuments important to the settler narrative of exploration and settlement. Tony Birch argues that control of the landscape, including toponymy and monuments that privilege

8 McKinnon, 'Unfinished Business – Pursuits'.

9 Judd and Ellinghaus, 'F. W. Albrecht', 178.

10 See Calabro, 'Investing in Knowledge'.

explorers and pioneers, is a way of naturalising settler possession.¹¹ Tracey Banivanua Mar claims that landscapes can be read as settler scripts, 'physically inscribed with historical narratives that naturalize and legitimize settler sovereignty'.¹² We draw on these insights to examine how memorials to McMillan are not just records of history, or material artefacts from the past, but active scripts that continue to assert settler power, and that embed settler narratives in the landscape in ways that legitimise the dispossession of Aboriginal people and anchor local memories to white identity, belonging and pride.¹³

Scholarship on whiteness in Australia also underpins our analysis. Most monuments in Australia commemorate individual white male 'pioneers' and war heroes.¹⁴ In this paper we chart a range of articulations of white possession that correspond with patterns identified by leading whiteness scholar, Goenpul academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson.¹⁵ Whiteness, Moreton-Robinson argues, is expressed through adaptable 'possessive logics': a mode of rationalisation that continually works to affirm settler legitimacy and settler sovereignty through a 'process of perpetual dispossession'.¹⁶ In historicising the memorialisation of McMillan, and by examining the arguments made by contemporary defenders of the cairns, we identify deployments of possessive logics that naturalise and justify the violence represented by 'monuments to colonialism'.¹⁷ Throughout the twentieth century, settler connections to the cairns, and to the broader narrative of McMillan's colonial project, have been reasserted. In this paper, we explore historical moments when the cairns have been invoked to support settler political imperatives. In doing so, we aim to connect the failed proposal in 2020 with a longer trajectory of changing strategies and narratives of settler possession linked symbolically with the cairns.

The role of monuments as markers of settler colonial possession is fundamental to why they are, as Jane Lydon observes, 'the most contested and enduring forms of public history'.¹⁸ The revision of Australian settler histories to acknowledge frontier violence has led to the amendment of some monuments and the creation of 'counter-monuments' to recognise Aboriginal peoples and histories.¹⁹ Monuments have become

11 Birch, 'Nothing Has Changed', 107.

12 Banivanua Mar, 'Settler-Colonial Landscapes and Narratives of Possession', 173.

13 Birch, 'Nothing Has Changed', 107, 114; Banivanua Mar, 'Settler-Colonial Landscapes and Narratives of Possession', 173.

14 Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*; Pinto, 'Unsettling the Settler City'.

15 Moreton-Robinson argues that there was a shift from the early twentieth-century use of whiteness to mask 'ethnic heterogeneity of British immigrants' to the contemporary 'multicultural' context where 'the egalitarian myth that Australia is a "tolerant society" is deployed to mask the persistently privileged position of whiteness and its possession of the nation that simultaneously disavows Indigenous sovereignty'. Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, 24.

16 Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, xiii.

17 Frank and Ristic, 'Urban Fallism'.

18 Lydon, 'Driving By', 4.

19 See Bulbeck, 'Australian History Set in Concrete?'; Read, "'The Truth That Will Set Us All Free'"; Scates and Frances, 'Honouring the Aboriginal Dead'; Ashton and Hamilton, 'Places of the Heart'. For counter-monuments see Pinto, 'Unsettling the Settler City'; Land, *Forms of Monuments to Complex Histories*; Land, Balla and Golding, *BlaK Cook Book*.

intensely politically contested in the broader global context of movements for justice, with the 2015 Rhodes Must Fall and the BLM campaign beginning in the United States in 2013 and peaking again in 2020.²⁰ These movements have added a groundswell of support to protests in Australian major cities that targeted statues and memorials, yet there have been few monuments removed in Australia and, until recently, little scholarly recognition of the generative potential of removing monuments.²¹

Some settler historians and heritage scholars have engaged in the ‘Statue Wars’, yet this debate has focused less on the impact of memorials on First Nations communities, and more on questions of heritage and of making amendments to memorials.²² This has included questions of ownership over the narratives told through, and upheld by, monuments. First Nations and other scholars have taken more critical perspectives that focus on the impacts of colonial memorials on First Nations peoples, including Nathan ‘Mudy’ Sentance, Mariko Smith, Stephen Gapps and Tony Birch, all of whom advocate monument removal.²³ Birch’s argument that memorials to colonisers ‘inhibit the potential for truth-telling and the ability to produce the more honest and mature story that this country desperately needs’ echoes the words of Aunty Doris Paton about the impact of the cairns on her community.²⁴ As these scholars highlight, challenges to monuments in Australia are part of broader efforts of First Nations people to re-educate the settler population with the aim to address ignorance of colonisation and First Nations histories – an ignorance perpetuated by public histories.²⁵ As we argue in this article, the broader settler colonial project of public education has been

20 In 2013, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi launched the Black Lives Matter campaign in response to the murder of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of his murderer, ‘A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement’. See Timmerman, ‘A Case for Removing Confederate Monuments’; Chaudhuri, ‘The Real Meaning of Rhodes Must Fall after the Nation’s Long Retreat from Multiculturalism and the Return of a Rose-Tinted Memory of Empire, It Is No Accident That the Rhodes Must Fall Movement Has Come to Britain’, *Guardian*, 16 March 2016; Rahul Rao, ‘On Statues’, *The Disorder of Things* (blog), 2 April 2016, thedisorderofthings.com/2016/04/02/on-statues/; Shepherd, ‘After the #fall’. See Samayeen, Wong and McCarthy, ‘Space to Breathe’; Perhamus and Joldersma, ‘What Might Sustain the Activism of This Moment?’; Evans and Lees, ‘Introduction to the Special Issue on Reframing Confederate Monuments’.

21 Frank Bongiorno has argued that ‘the question of whether an inscription on a statue should be altered seems ultimately to depend on whose story is at stake’. Bongiorno, ‘The Statue Wars’, *Inside Story*, 4 September 2017, insidestory.org.au/the-statue-wars/. Jenny Gregory stated that, as ‘an historian of Anglo-Celtic heritage’, she believes the removal of monuments would ‘distort history’ and that it is ‘more reasonable’ to leave them ‘with amendments’ or to remove them to parks or museums. Gregory, ‘Statue Wars’.

22 For example, Royal Historical Society of Victoria, ‘What to Do with Our Statues and Monuments’, 23 June 2020, accessed 8 July 2021, www.historyvictoria.org.au/what-to-do-with-our-statues-and-monuments/.

23 Lindsey and Smith, ‘Statue Wars’; Birch, ‘Do Monuments Hold Any Value?’; Gapps, ‘Keep Them, Counter Them or Tear Them Down?’; Sentance, ‘A Matter of History’.

24 Tony Birch, ‘Do Monuments Hold Any Value?’ *Indigenous X*, 14 January 2021, accessed 7 April 2021, indigenoux.com.au/do-monuments-hold-any-value/.

25 This has taken numerous forms. Recently, Megan Davis has pointed out that the Uluru Statement from the Heart was directed to a settler audience first, and politicians second, Davis, ‘The Long Road to Uluru’. There are many historicised examples, including Maynard’s examination of the centrality of media attention and settler support to the Freedom Rides, the Gurundji Walk-Off and the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, in ‘Tracking Back’. The concept of ‘re-storying’ is also being applied in other fields, see, for example, Thalia Anthony, Andreea Lachsz and Nerita Waight, ‘The Role of “Re-storying” in Addressing Over-Incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’, *Conversation*, 17 August 2021, accessed 19 August 2021, theconversation.com/the-role-of-re-storying-in-addressing-over-incarceration-of-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-163577.

central to attempts to legitimise settler possession.²⁶ Aunty Doris grew up knowing the truth that McMillan was a murderer, and, as she pointed out in her submission to the WSC, the cairns repress that truth by instead celebrating his 'explorations'. The responsibility and imperative for First Nations people to re-educate settlers about settler colonialism is an oft-noted exhausting form of intellectual labour, hence Aunty Doris's refusal to provide the WSC with a 'history lesson' regarding McMillan.²⁷

Similarly, with this paper, we are not contributing to debates about McMillan's actions, or the veracity of the colonial record.²⁸ It is worth noting, however, that there is limited archival material regarding McMillan's crimes. Aware of the hanging of white perpetrators of the Myall Creek massacre in 1838, McMillan's Highlander Brigade (which operated until 1844 without legal scrutiny), recorded little of their 'clashes' with locals.²⁹ The brevity of written evidence has been used to justify the ongoing debate, including questions about whether McMillan was the leader of the brigade, and in attempts to discredit other forms of evidence including survivors' oral histories and archaeological evidence.³⁰ Nonetheless, since the 1980s, through the work of Peter Gardner, Phillip Pepper and Don Watson, it has become more widely acknowledged that McMillan was responsible for the deaths of Aboriginal people.³¹

What has received less attention is how the ideological legacy of McMillan's memorialisation in the 1920s continues to influence the contemporary situation on Gunaikurnai Country. To address this, we build on scholarship that historicises memorialisation as part of the wider nationalist project in Australia by drawing links between the memorialisation of McMillan to the political landscape of Victoria at two key points: the 1920s and 1960s.³² We examine how McMillan's actions have

26 Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández, 'Curriculum, Replacement, and Settler Futurity'; Seixas, 'National History and Beyond'; Carretero, 'Imagining the National Throughout School History Master Narratives'; Carretero, *Constructing Patriotism*; Keynes, 'History Education, Citizenship, and State Formation'; Mycock, 'After Empire'; Keynes and Marsden, 'Ontology, Sovereignty, Legitimacy'.

27 For example, see Luke Pearson, 'This Reconciliation Week, Take Some Time to Learn about Whiteness', *Indigenous X*, 29 May 2018, accessed 14 June 2021, indigenoux.com.au/luke-pearson-this-reconciliation-week-take-some-time-to-learn-about-whiteness/; Kerry Klimm (@flashblak), 'Wake Me When Reconciliation Week Is Over', Twitter, 30 September 2020, accessed 14 June 2021, twitter.com/flashblak. Hudson and Woodcock's *Self-Determined First Nations Museums and Colonial Contestations* explores the complexity and care of this work through the Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place in Bairnsdale.

28 For written accounts of Gunaikurnai dispossession see Pepper and de Araujo, *What Did Happen to the Aborigines of Victoria*; Gardner, *Through Foreign Eyes*; Gardner, *Our Founding Murdering Father*; Gardner, *Gippsland Massacres*; Watson, *Caledonia Australis*. The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry on McMillan was changed in 2017 to include accounts of his violence, Cheryl Glowrey, 'McMillan, Angus (1810–1865)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mcmillan-angus-2416/text34996, published online 2017, accessed online 5 December 2022.

29 Gardner, 'The Bones of the Warrigal Creek Massacre'.

30 Debates involving local historians recommenced after the 2020 council vote. For example, Wayne Caldwell, 'The Warrigal Creek Massacre: True Story or Apocryphal?', *Quadrant*, 30 December 2020, accessed 20 June 2021, quadrant.org.au/magazine/2020/12/the-warrigal-creek-massacre-true-story-or-apocryphal/; Gardner, 'The Warrigal Creek Massacre – a Reply to Wayne Caldwell', self-published online 2020.

31 Pepper and de Araujo, *What Did Happen to the Aborigines of Victoria*; Gardner, *Through Foreign Eyes*; *Our Founding Murdering Father*; Gardner, *Gippsland Massacres*; Watson, *Caledonia Australis*.

32 Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*; Paterson, 'History in Stone'; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*.

been both memorialised and inscribed into the landscape via public history practices during these key periods. We then turn to the 2020 debate over the WSC vote to remove the cairns and situate this within the continuity of the settler colonial project. Throughout both sections of this paper, we also draw attention to the community-led, grassroots rescripting of the McMillan narrative.

The Victorian Historical Memorials Committee and public histories

The vast region spanning the south-east of Victoria, now called Gippsland, comprises the traditional lands of the Gunaikurnai who represent five language groups: the Brataulooong, Briakaulooong, Krautungaloong, Tatungaloong and Brabroloong.³³ The Gunaikurnai defended their Country against Angus McMillan when he first arrived. He responded with violence.³⁴ In 1843, in response to the killing of a fellow Scottish squatter, McMillan helped form the Highlander Brigade, which launched a series of reprisal attacks killing approximately 150 Gunaikurnai in what is known as the Warrigal Creek massacre.³⁵ Between 1840 and 1850, McMillan was further involved in attacks on Gunaikurnai people at Nuntin, Boney Point, Butchers Creek, Skull Creek, Maffra, Slaughterhouse Gully and Brodribb River.³⁶ Despite his crimes, McMillan remained prominent in the pastoralist society of Gippsland, where he died in 1865.

More than 60 years after McMillan's death, the Victorian Historical Memorials Committee launched a campaign to memorialise his 'exploration' of Gippsland. The campaign coincided with a tumultuous year in Victorian politics in which debates over memorialisation were a key issue. After coming to power in April 1924, George Michael Prendergast's short-lived Labor government sought to redirect public history narratives glorifying war that had been so important to the Nationalist government of Alexander Peacock. Prendergast's minister of public instruction decreed 'all articles adulatory of war and war heroes be expunged from Education Department literature, especially its weekly *School Paper*, and that, instead, school children be imbued with peace and internationalism'.³⁷ Backlash against this attempted redirection of public history narratives away from a militarised nationalism likely contributed to the quick fall of Prendergast's government in November that year by the combined efforts of

33 Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation, 'Gunaikurnai People', 2017, accessed 11 August 2021, www.ramahyuck.org/about/gunaikurnai-people/.

34 Gardner, *European Exploration and Occupation of the Victorian Alps*; Flynn, *Thicker than Water*, 22.

35 Ryan, et al., 'Colonial Frontier Massacre Groups', *Colonial Frontier Massacres in Australia, 1788–1930*, 2017–22, accessed 10 August 2021, c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/groups.php.

36 See Ryan et al., *Colonial Frontier Massacres in Australia, 1788–1930*.

37 Prendergast refused a £50,000 grant to the National War Memorial Committee for the building of the Shrine of Remembrance and an Anzac Day public holiday. Deery and Bongiorno, 'Two Anzac Controversies of the 1920s', 208–9.

the National and Country parties, who, after taking power, emphasised conservative projects to prompt public history that memorialised imperialism, nationalism, explorers and pioneers. One example is the series of cairns built marking out the 1824 route taken by explorers Hamilton Hume and William Hovell from Albury to Geelong that were the subject of a series of celebratory unveilings throughout December 1924.³⁸ The success of this venture inspired a group of administrators connected with the Victorian Historical Society to form the Victorian Historical Memorials Committee who turned their attention to erecting more cairns memorialising the routes of other 'explorers' in Victoria.³⁹

The cairns served as a tangible demonstration of settler claims of ownership over the landscape. As Tom Griffiths has argued, the memorial craze, driven in part at least by the desire of white settlers to 'inscribe' possession onto the land, was also a form of symbolic dispossession of Aboriginal people.⁴⁰ At the same time that contests over white settler national identity and memory were playing out in the political sphere in the 1920s, the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines implemented its plan to close down Aboriginal reserves across Victoria.⁴¹ The Coranderrk Aboriginal Station was closed in 1924, leaving Lake Tyers Aboriginal Reserve, in the far east of Gippsland, the last piece of land designated for Aboriginal peoples' occupation in the state. It was to Gippsland that, in 1926, the Memorials Committee turned their focus, through a project to erect a series of cairns across the region to mark out the route purportedly taken by McMillan in the 1840s.⁴² This choice to build memorials to McMillan, who had both 'settled' Gippsland and been responsible for the massacre of Gunaikurnai people (so close to Lake Tyers), seems to have served a dual purpose: to emphasise dispossession and to reinforce white possession.

After the Memorials Committee fixed on the idea of building memorials to McMillan, some members travelled to Gippsland to launch their campaign and encourage local settler community support.⁴³ Not everyone liked the idea. The city of Sale initially declined to be involved. There was also resistance in nearby Maffra, where Sir James Barrett, chairman of the committee, tried to convince the local settlers, the *Gippsland Times* reported, by exhorting 'Gippsland to rise to the occasion, and erect cairns along

38 Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*; 'Explorers' Commemorated: The Hume-Hovell Ceremony', *Age* (Melbourne), 16 August 1924, 17; 'Honouring Hume and Hovell', *Herald* (Melbourne), 5 December 1924, 6. On the closure of reserves in Victoria, see Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians*, 208–9; Pepper and de Araujo, *What Did Happen to the Aborigines of Victoria*.

39 Deery and Bongiorno, 'Two Anzac Controversies of the 1920s', 208–9. The string of cairns was in keeping with the trend to move away from the single monuments that had been common prior to the First World War.

40 Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 148–53.

41 Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 151.

42 'Gippsland Explorers', *Gippsland Times*, 6 December 1926, 3. While not a concern of this paper, the explorations of Polish Count Strzelecki were also part of this project in Gippsland. Paterson argues that Strzelecki was harder for the committee to incorporate into their imperialistic narratives of white possession. Paterson, 'History in Stone', 82. The committee also decided to erect memorials to Charles Sturt and Thomas Mitchell at this time.

43 Paterson, 'History in Stone', 75.

the route taken by the explorers'.⁴⁴ Barrett's appeals failed, however, and no cairn was built at Maffra. Elsewhere, as Rula Paterson has shown, exactly how McMillan was to be remembered, and the meaning of the cairns, was also contested, with some towns modifying the memorials to more accurately reflect what the local settler community valued.⁴⁵ At Benambra, for example, the cairn was modified to include dedications to James McFarlane and John Prendergast; at Swift's Creek, the cairn was used to mark the place where a local man had been killed by bushrangers in the 1850s.⁴⁶ These variations show that, even at their inception, the purpose of the cairns was contested and malleable, and responsive to different local priorities.

Yet while there was some contestation over what and who the cairns should memorialise, many other settler communities in Gippsland enthusiastically took up the project.⁴⁷ The cairns were cheap, quick and easy to build, due in part to the fact that most were made of local stone. This choice of material was likely used to suggest antiquity, and to symbolically connect McMillan to the landscape.⁴⁸ While the contest over who should be memorialised depended on local context, it was also unclear where exactly to place the cairns, as the route supposedly taken by McMillan through Gippsland remained uncharted in 1926. The committee took this as an opportunity to record the path McMillan had taken. The Melbourne press reported that this meant 'the chronicling of much previously unrecorded history gathered from the fast-disappearing Gippsland pioneers'.⁴⁹ McMillan had died some 60 years earlier (and his explorations took place in the 1840s) and the 'pioneers' who not yet 'disappeared' would have been in their 80s in 1926. This recovery of McMillan's route from settler memory prompted some further public debate, including proposed toponymical changes like the suggestion that the Thompson River be renamed after McMillan.⁵⁰

The monuments to McMillan, like those to Hume and Hovell, were part of broader political and educative goals. The committee saw the cairns as an opportunity to instruct and involve settler communities in their view of a grand patriotic narrative – to instil pride and a strong sense of both Australian nationalism and commitment

44 *Gippsland Times*, 6 December 1926, 3.

45 At Heyfield the township decided they would dedicate the cairn to Strzelecki, not McMillan. Paterson, 'History in Stone', 76–77.

46 Paterson, 'History in Stone', 76–77.

47 Griffith, *Hunters and Collectors*, 158.

48 Griffith, *Hunters and Collectors*, 158–59; Paterson, 'History in Stone', 67. As Andrea Lynn Smith and Randy John Nédhőwes have shown, using stone to build memorials to explorers in the United States during the same period similarly aimed to suggest a 'false sense of pre-ordination', 'Monuments, Legitimization Ceremonies', 343–44. Scholars examining role of politicians, local businessmen and civic leaders in creating national parks in the United States demonstrate the importance of these local influences. See, for example, Huntley, *The Making of Yosemite*.

49 *Bulletin*, 47, no. 2442, 2 December 1926, 46.

50 'State Teacher's Association', *Gippsland Times*, 17 February 1927, 5; The *Gippsland Times* recognised that this proposed change was controversial but supported the move regardless, stating that the 'importance of requiring to alter records should not be permitted to outweigh the necessity of placing geographically on record the daring exploits of a brave man'. 'Re-naming the Thomson River', *Gippsland Times*, 24 February 1927, 4.

to remaining on the land.⁵¹ The memorialisation of 'explorers' (much like support for and memorialisation of war), was also pushed through Victorian state schools during this period.⁵² Given that the director of education, Frank Tate, and his right-hand-man, Charles Long, were influential members of the Memorials Committee, it is hardly surprising that these aims were aligned.⁵³ Tate and Long used their positions to encourage the participation of teachers and schoolchildren to raise funds for and promote the cairns.⁵⁴ Tate was particularly interested in promoting a program of rural reform due to urban drift and the declining population of the area. He hoped a greater sense of pride would encourage young Gippslanders to remain on the land.⁵⁵ The involvement of the Victorian Tourism Board, and the promotion of Gippsland's industries and landscape during the unveiling of the cairns in 1927, suggest that there were other economic purposes too, an echo of the commercial interests that spurred McMillan's initial exploration in 1843.⁵⁶ In this way, the idea of the cairns was a means of anchoring the Gippsland settler population to place, an overt form of settlement and possession, by tying local mythology to the greater national story and purpose of race unity.

By the beginning of 1927, the cairns were completed and a procession comprising committee members travelled through Gippsland for a series of ceremonial unveilings.⁵⁷ Members of the committee addressed the crowds, as did Lord Somers, the governor of Victoria, who, the *Age* reported, declared '[h]e hoped they would keep Australia white, and not allow coloured races to take control'. At another ceremony, the *Age* reported Somers's comments that 'Victoria was greatly indebted to its pioneers for what they had done in opening up the country for settlement'.⁵⁸ The reports also referenced Somers on the educative role of the memorials in promoting awareness and pride in explorers, such as his suggestion that 'young Victorians, if they studied the history of their country, would get an inspiration to emulate the deeds of the pioneers'.⁵⁹

51 As historians of public history have noted, social psychology scholars have established the centrality of historical perception to the development of national identity. Carretero, 'Imagining the Nation Throughout School History Master Narratives', 103.

52 See Triolo, 'Doing All That Is Possible'.

53 Long had retired in 1925; Tate retired in 1928. The extent to which the Department of Education's *School Paper* was used as to convey nationalistic narratives, while at the same time marginalising Aboriginal people, history and culture, has been widely established by historians. See for example, Healy, 'Race, Citizenship and National Identity in *The School Paper*, 1946–1968'; Gibbs, 'Victorian School Books'.

54 Long cited in Griffith, *Hunters and Collectors*, 158–59.

55 Paterson, 'History in Stone'.

56 Paterson, 'History in Stone', 72.

57 Griffith, *Hunters and Collectors*, 150–54.

58 'Governor in Gippsland', *Age* (Melbourne), 9 April 1927, 18.

59 'Governor in Gippsland', *Age*, 9 April 1927, 18.

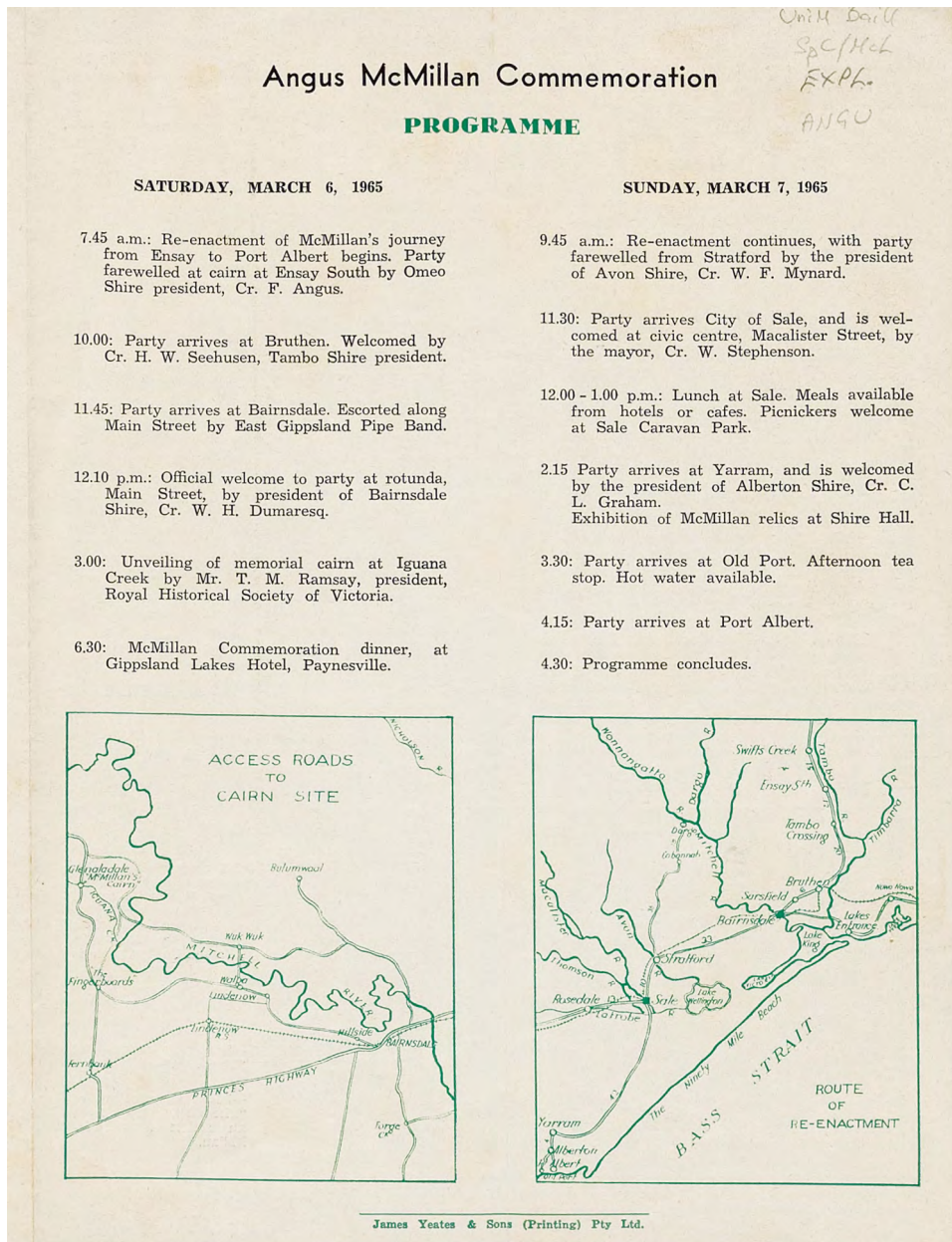


Figure 2: An extract from the 1965 promotional pamphlet produced to commemorate the centenary of McMillan's death, mapping the planned re-enactment tour.

Source: Produced by the Bairnsdale, Omeo, Sale and Yarram historical societies, reproduced with permission of the East Gippsland Historical Society.

McMillan continued to be venerated in Gippsland through the mid-twentieth century. In 1948, his name was given to the federal electorate spanning the west and south of Gippsland.⁶⁰ In the 1960s, 40 years after the unveiling of the cairns, the memorialisation of McMillan continued to be enacted by the settler community. This included several events in 1965, the centenary year of McMillan's death. The Bairnsdale Historical Society held a re-enactment of McMillan's route from Ensay to Port Albert as part of their 'Angus McMillan Commemoration Programme', organised by the society at the behest of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria.⁶¹ The program included the 'Angus McMillan Commemoration Dinner', attended by the president of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, who also unveiled a new cairn dedicated to McMillan at Iguana Creek, as well as a display of 'McMillan Relics' at the Yarram Shire Hall. This program was supported by the local historical societies of Yarram, Sale and Omeo, and sponsored by large industries with economic interests in Gippsland – the Australian Paper Manufacturers Limited and Esso Standard Oil Limited.⁶² In May, some of the settler community in East Gippsland (including some participants in blackface) staged a re-enactment of McMillan's 'exploration', ending with a celebration in Orbost.⁶³ While these events commemorated McMillan's death, they also took place during a year in which organised Aboriginal political activity was at a peak, including the fierce contest over the future of the nearby Lake Tyers Aboriginal Reserve – the last Aboriginal reserve in the state – that played out between the Aboriginal community and the Victorian Government.⁶⁴

The mid-century re-enactments – the act of walking across the land in performative claims of possession – reiterated the earlier tradition of 'pilgrimages' undertaken by schoolchildren to McMillan's grave in the 1920s.⁶⁵ Other forms of commemoration, and challenges to these narratives, came in published works. In 1973, local historian Kenneth Cox published *Angus McMillan: Pathfinder*. The preface emphasised the idea of personal historical responsibility, suggesting that readers should learn more about the 'pioneers in this country', echoing comments made by Somers in 1927.⁶⁶ Cox's account of McMillan's life is based on scant evidence, and includes flourishes

60 Australian Electoral Commission, 'Profile of the Electoral Division of McMillan (Vic)', updated 19 November 2019, accessed 5 August 2021, www.aec.gov.au/profiles/vic/mcmillan.htm.

61 Bairnsdale Historical Society, *A Tribute to Angus McMillan, Discoverer of Gippsland, on the Centenary of His Death*.

62 Bairnsdale Historical Society, 'Angus McMillan Commemoration Dinner'. The involvement of Esso in the commemoration may have been linked to their economic interests in Gippsland during this time: they were undertaking exploratory gas drilling off the coast of Ninety Mile Beach in 1965, 'Second Esso Gas Strike Proves A Winner', *Canberra Times*, 13 July 1965, 16. A new government ministry, the Ministry of Fuel and Power, was established in part in response to the gas finds: 'New Ministry Prompted by Gas Strike', *Canberra Times*, 14 July 1965, 13; 'Victorian Parliament: Gas "as Valuable as Gold Finds"', *Canberra Times*, 15 September 1965, 11.

63 'McMillan's First Journey Exploring Gippsland', *Gippsland Times*, 13 May 1965, 1; 'Friday and McMillan', *Gippsland Times*, 17 May 1965, 1.

64 See Taffe, 'Fighting for Lake Tyers'.

65 Annual pilgrimages to McMillan's grave were held between the early 1920s and the 1940s, as reported in the local Gippsland press. See, for example, 'Annual Pilgrimage to Angus McMillan's Grave', *Gippsland Times*, 8 December 1930, 5; 'Pilgrimage to Angus McMillan's Grave: Tributes Paid', *Gippsland Times*, 18 April 1940, 3.

66 Cox, *Angus McMillan*. This preface was written by the past president of the Traralgon and District Historical Society, Dr McLean.

of creative non-fiction such as imagined dialogue. In 1988, when many Australians celebrated the bicentenary of the First Fleet's arrival, Peter Gardner published his deliberately provocatively titled text *Our Founding Murdering Father: Angus McMillan and the Kurnai Tribe of Gippsland, 1839–1865*. Written in part in response to Cox, Gardner's detailing of McMillan's role in the massacres was a controversial intervention in what was otherwise mostly celebratory memorialisation of McMillan among the settler community. However, changes around this time saw greater acknowledgement of McMillan's violence. In 1988, another publication based on a re-enactment, *Across the Alps: Retracing Angus McMillan's 1864 Alpine Expedition*, included a more measured assessment of McMillan's character, describing him as the 'alleged discoverer of Gippsland', with a 'controversial career' and directly referencing his role as a 'murderer of aborigines [*sic*]'.⁶⁷

The reinscription of McMillan's explorations – via publications, public re-enactments and debates throughout the twentieth century – is a form of reasserting but also revising the colonial metanarrative of exploration and white possession to meet the contemporary objectives and pressures of the moment. Writing of the so-called history wars of the 2000s, Banivanua Mar argued that the public sentiment driving the debate was the result of a 'cognitive environment where settler historical consciousness remain[s] firmly tethered to colonial metanarratives' underpinned, in part, by physical landscapes 'inscribed with the names, practices and material things of a settler-colonial past that actively suppresses Aboriginal inscriptions'.⁶⁸ The visibility and materiality of the cairns to McMillan are central to the celebratory ways he has been remembered in Gippsland through the twentieth century, and even in more recent years as awareness of his crimes has become more widespread and acknowledged.⁶⁹ They are key markers of the landscape and of the 'cognitive environment' of settler consciousness, simultaneously eliding First Nations sovereignty and justifying white possession through settler violence.

Another way that the settler 'cognitive environment' has been shaped around colonial narratives is through the school curriculum, a form of public history, along with memorials. For Aboriginal children in Gippsland (and around Australia) going to school has often meant recognising that the version of history in the curriculum was very different to that they had learned from their families.⁷⁰ Aunt Doris learned about McMillan from her family. She recalls that:

67 Christie, *Across the Alps*.

68 Banivanua Mar, 'Settler-Colonial Landscapes', 180.

69 A walking club was established in 1965 soon after the creation of 'McMillan's Walking Track', a 220 km track from Omeo to Wood's Point. Ben Cruachan Walking Club, 'McMillans Walking Track', accessed 17 July 2021, bencruachanwalkingclub.com/mcmillan-s-track.html; McMillan's original homestead, Bushy Park, including some of his possessions, is now on display at the Old Gippsland Heritage Park in Moe: Victorian Collections, 'Building – Bushy Park, late 1840s', accessed 17 July 2021. victoriancollections.net.au/items/506117c82162ef0848c5d3cc.

70 There are numerous references to Angus McMillan, and many other men like him, in the Victorian Education Department's *School Paper*, a monthly publication that all students were required to purchase.

my father told us of the history of our people and the massacres that happened on our country. I always got into trouble for telling what my father told us about our history. Even then I knew what they were teaching us about McMillan was not true.

As an adult, Aunty Doris trained as a teacher following in the footsteps of her great grandparents who taught on missions and reserves at Lake Tyers, Ramahyuck and Lake Condah in the Western District.⁷¹ Aunty Doris then became involved in curriculum reform at a local level and went on to work in education reform at a state and national level:

My father also told us another side to history, which I realised, wasn't what schools were teaching in the curriculum ... Re-shaping the curriculum became the opportunity to tell another story. I realised teachers and those before them taught a colonised view of history ... their perspectives on curriculum were informed by historians, anthropologists and archaeologists views of the time.

Aunty Doris's father, respected Gunaikurnai Elder Uncle Albert Mullett, also recognised the repressive weight of public histories, including a school curriculum and memorialisation that positioned men like McMillan as heroic figures. Uncle Albert acted on the need to counter these narratives, not only for Aboriginal children but also for the children of settlers, and in 1980, he gave his attention to the school curriculum, teaching Aboriginal culture at the Bairnsdale State School, later becoming a spokesperson for the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.⁷² Yet while these changes being pushed through by Gunaikurnai people took place at a state government level, changes on a local government level have been slower to occur. The WSC vote against the removal of the McMillan cairns demonstrates the role of local government in protecting and perpetuating narratives that place value in dispossession, and not in sovereignty.

‘Enough is enough’ in the Wellington Shire

On 16 June 2020, the vote to remove two of the 18 McMillan cairns was held at the WSC chambers in the regional city of Sale. Introducing the motion, Councillor Carolyn Crossley reminded the audience that, in 2018, historical evidence and community input had convinced the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) to remove McMillan's name from the federal electorate, so named since 1948. Crossley pointed out that the vote on the cairns was ‘not a debate about the research into the history, it is one about reconciliation’.⁷³ In pointing towards a generative resolution, Crossley attempted to refocus discussion away from historical detail towards ethics,

71 Mullett with Atkinson, ‘Living as a Koori in Victoria’.

72 Mullett with Atkinson, ‘Living as a Koori in Victoria’; ‘Uncle Albert Mullett’, Deadly Story, accessed 2 July 2021, web.archive.org/web/20230202074431/https://deadlystory.com/page/aboriginal-country-map/Aboriginal_Country_Completed/gunaikurnai/Elders_Role_Models/Albert-Mullett.

73 WSC Minutes 16 June 2020.

morality and responsibility. While reconciliation discourses may be a driver for some revisions of memorials in Australia, considering the low profile of the reconciliation movement within the Gippsland area, this campaign to remove the cairns could be more accurately seen as a reckoning with the past.⁷⁴

Gunaikurnai community organisations, Elders and community leaders such as Aunty Doris had been driving the push for historical reckoning in the WSC well before the 2020 vote. For example, the successful two-year campaign for the VEC to remove McMillan's name from the federal electorate was led by the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC).⁷⁵ While the removal of McMillan's name was important, Aunty Doris felt the decision to rename the electorate after Sir John Monash, instead of a Gunaikurnai name, was another slap down for the community. The community has also been involved in raising awareness of frontier violence.⁷⁶ In 2018, the East Gippsland Aboriginal Corporation (GEGAC) and GLaWAC were involved in the production of *The Warrigal Creek Massacre* documentary.⁷⁷ GLaWAC also extended invitations to WSC councillors for cultural training, which has since been made mandatory by the shire.⁷⁸ The cumulative effect of these efforts has resulted in McMillan's name being removed from schools, honour boards, TAFE campuses and sports teams across Gippsland.⁷⁹ The cairns, however, remain fixed as physical markers on the landscape, and in settler colonial consciousness.⁸⁰

In 2020, community engagement with the proposed removal of the cairns represented what historian Alexandra Dellios terms a 'maturing public rhetoric' in the region around heritage and history.⁸¹ Yet it also reveals a persistent attachment to the idea that the cairns represent McMillan's legacy. Prior to the vote, the WSC received 239 submissions via emails, phone calls and online forms, leading one councillor to claim it was the largest community response to an issue for some time.⁸² Submissions fell into three main categories: 55 per cent supported the motion for removal, 23 per cent supported the retention of the cairns modified to include an acknowledgement

74 See Gunstone, 'Indigenous Rights and the 1991–2000 Australian Reconciliation Process'; Ward, 'Reconciling His History'; Darian-Smith and Edmonds, *Conciliation on Colonial Frontiers*; Edmonds, "'Walking Together" for Reconciliation'. For a survey of attitudes to reconciliation in the neighbouring shire to the WSC, see Gunstone, 'Attitudes towards Reconciliation in East Gippsland, Victoria'. In 2022, the WSC does not currently have a Reconciliation Action Plan and has not made a commitment to reconciliation.

75 'AEC Asked to Consider McMillan Name Change to Remove Association with Aboriginal Massacres', ABC Gippsland, 24 November 2017, accessed 15 July 2021, www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-24/aec-consider-mcmillan-name-change/9183272; Cal Flynn's *Thicker than Water*, examining her family connection to McMillan, was published in 2016 and drew interest and criticism from the settler community.

76 This has included a range of actions undertaken by community networks based on solidarity, and "'collaboration" against colonial contestation'. Hudson and Woodcock, *Self-Determined First Nations Museums and Colonial Contestation*, 86.

77 Dodd and Gye, *The Warrigal Creek Massacre*; see 'The Warrigal Creek Massacre', accessed 15 July 2021, web.archive.org/web/20201201214310/http://www.thewarrigalcreekmassacre.film/screenings/.

78 Dodd and Gye, *The Warrigal Creek Massacre*; Darren McCubbin, personal communication, 10 August 2020.

79 McCubbin, WSC Minutes 16 June 2020.

80 Lydon, 'Driving By'.

81 Dellios, *Heritage Making and Migrant Subjects in the Deindustrialising Region of the Latrobe Valley*, 37.

82 WSC Minutes 16 June 2020.

of 'true history' and 17 per cent opposed the removal or alteration of the cairns.⁸³ As Mayor Alan Hall pointed out, 78 per cent of respondents supported either the removal or addition of text from the Gunaikurnai perspective, a message that Hall interpreted as 'one way or another, enough is enough'.⁸⁴

The WSC also heard spoken testimony prior to the vote. This included a statement on behalf of Gunaikurnai by Grattan Mullett, general manager of culture at GLaWAC. Mullett told the WSC that 'the cairns represent a celebration of history where colonists arrived on Gunaikurnai land and committed forms of genocide'.⁸⁵ He emphasised the imperative for consultation and change, making clear GLaWAC's good faith intentions to work with the WSC:

The symbolism of these cairns to the First People is significant. It is an issue that has been clearly on the community agenda for quite a while. We are happy to discuss the best way forward with the shire and Government to ensure a more appropriate recognition of Gippsland history including the non-Aboriginal history. We do not propose to pull all of the cairns down, but significant and obvious actions, including pulling down or re-interpreting must be agreed between us.⁸⁶

Many Gunaikurnai people also expressed their support of the motion. Alice Pepper, Gunai community member, collected and submitted over 30 letters calling for the cairns to be removed.⁸⁷ Gunaikurnai man and manager of the Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place, Rob Hudson, argued that the cairns' removal would not 'get rid of history but make us a stronger people'.⁸⁸ Gunaikurnai community member Ruth Walker told the council 'for us to move forward we need to address our past, and that's not just ours it's yours ... it is very painful to have these monuments up'.⁸⁹ While these comments make clear the harm caused by the cairns, they also serve as an invitation to the settler community and the WSC to work collaboratively to create a shared narrative about the past.

Submissions from individuals opposing the motion to remove the cairns show how some settlers see their connection to McMillan, and how this is underpinned by possessive logics. In some submissions, settlers expressly identified themselves as 'rate payers' and, therefore, property owners. Others claimed the motion was a 'rushed' decision to 'erase local history'; some argued for the need to recognise 'both

83 The remaining 5 per cent of submissions were classified as 'other'. Wellington Shire Council (WSC) Meeting Video Recording, YouTube, 16 June 2020.

84 The WSC heard also heard testimony from 10 constituents, eight of whom spoke in support of the removal motion. WSC Minutes 16 June 2020.

85 WSC Minutes 16 June 2020.

86 Grattan Mullett, 'GLaWAC Media Statement', 27 August 2020. This statement is a slightly modified version of that spoken at the WSC meeting on 16 June 2020, and is reproduced here with permission from Roger Fenwick, CEO of GLaWAC.

87 WSC Meeting Video Recording 16 June 2020.

88 WSC Meeting Video Recording 16 June 2020.

89 WSC Meeting Video Recording 16 June 2020.

sides'; others opposed the erasure of 'our heritage'.⁹⁰ Some submissions referred to McMillan's 'achievements' in 'opening up' the Gippsland area, echoing language used by the Memorials Committee in the 1920s.⁹¹ Pauline Hitchins, the chair of the Wellington Shire History Network told the WSC: 'It is not only a case of Black Lives Matter but that all lives matter and so do their stories.' The removal of the cairns, she said, would deny 'today's truth that we are a modern multicultural society'. Hitchins's comments are an example of what Moreton-Robinson calls the 'race-blind and power-evasive discourse' of multiculturalism that masks white supremacy with the language of inclusion.⁹² These submissions also illustrate a shift from earlier celebratory assertions of settler connection to McMillan and to claims of belonging to explorers like McMillan. This demonstrates both the centrality of the cairns to local settler memory as well as their potential to be used in ways responsive to needs of the settler community in the contemporary era of truth-telling.

Councillors also spoke on this issue. Carmen Ripper claimed she was deeply conflicted about the issue but opposed the motion on the grounds of bad timing, suggesting that COVID-19 restrictions might have discouraged people from submitting handwritten letters on the proposal.⁹³ Like Hitchins, she used the term 'All lives matter' while debating the proposal.⁹⁴ Ian Bye expressed his opposition to the removal of what he called 'nearly 100-year-old artefacts that are part of history without better explanation from people I call experts'. He continued:

Whether it is the people from the Gunaikurnai or whether it's actually experts like Peter Synan or other historians who've done years of work on what McMillan actually did portrayed and what he actually did.⁹⁵

Bye's gesturing towards the authority of Gunaikurnai here is undermined by his qualification that 'experts' are white male historians. The positioning of historians as experts has been questioned by numerous scholars, including Birch, who has questioned the authority of historians to make decisions about how events are remembered when there are also moral, ethical and legal considerations.⁹⁶ As well as the expertise of Gunaikurnai, the WSC might reference examples of communities elsewhere engaged in renegotiating and rescripting forms of memorialisation.⁹⁷

90 WSC Minutes 16 June 2020; WSC Meeting Video Recording 16 June 2020.

91 WSC Meeting Video Recording 16 June 2020.

92 WSC Meeting Video Recording 16 June 2020; Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, 96.

93 Councillor Carmen Ripper, WSC Meeting Video Recording 16 June 2020. See Yancy and Butler, 'What's Wrong with "All Lives Matter"?'; see also Jedda Costa, 'Wellington Shire Council Votes to Keep Angus McMillan Monuments, Despite Explorer's Link to Murders', ABC Gippsland, 17 June 2020, accessed 24 July 2021, www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-17/wellington-council-votes-down-mcmillan-cairn-removal/12361546.

94 WSC Meeting Video Recording 16 June 2020.

95 Councillor Bye, WSC Meeting Video Recording 16 June 2020 (emphasis added).

96 Birch, "'The Invisible Fire'". See also Judd and Ellinghaus, 'F. W. Albrecht'.

97 As Charlotte Ward has shown, in Cooktown, the settler communities' desire to 'complete the story based on fact' has been addressed through engagement with the local Indigenous community that 'allowed space for different perspectives and epistemologies'. Ward, 'Reconciling His History', 13.

While the WSC voted against the proposal to removal the cairns, there was (and continues to be) a rescripting of the narratives of the cairns at a grassroots level. The submissions supporting the removal motion are part of this. Contests over the cairns contribute in other ways too. Ahead of the vote, as the BLM movement played out around the globe and red paint symbolising bloodshed was splashed across statues of explorers and colonisers around Australia, a banner reading 'Black Lives Matter' was hung over the cairn at Sale.⁹⁸ The following week, the cairn at Stratford was draped in an Aboriginal flag, emblazoned with the words 'Always Was, Always Will Be'.⁹⁹ The cairn at Rosedale was covered with a banner reading '432 Black Deaths in Custody with No Convictions: I Can't Breathe', the latter phrase referencing the words of both George Floyd and Dunghutti man David Dungay Junior who was killed in police custody in Australia in 2015. By rescripting the McMillan cairns in this way, these banners served to collapse the temporal distance between McMillan's role as a murderer in the 1840s and the ongoing violence of settler colonialism. These reinscriptions also underscore the urgency of removing monuments that valorise men known to have committed massacres of Aboriginal people. These statements remind us, as Wiradjuri man and decolonising archivist Nathan 'Mudyi' Sentance has pointed out, that the goal of removing colonial monuments is to create a 'more just society'.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

As Gunaikurnai community members have pointed out, the removal of two of the McMillan cairns will not erase McMillan from public memory. Instead, their removal would, in Auntie Doris's words, provide 'an opportunity to tell the truth about the impact of Gippsland's history for our Gunaikurnai people', and to create space for new understandings and other histories that more accurately reflect the community. For Auntie Doris and her family, fostering greater awareness of the past is part of a broader history of resistance and negotiation by Aboriginal people in Gippsland. Auntie Doris sees the potential for the recently appointed Yoorrook Justice Commission to be a catalyst to provoke deep thinking within the local council and acknowledgement – real acknowledgement – of the role of settler ancestors in the violent history of the region.¹⁰¹ This process of truth-telling, Auntie Doris suggests, has the potential to again shine light on the WSC's refusal to remove the cairns from Country.

98 Lindsey and Smith, 'Setting the Scene', 3; Costa, 'Wellington Shire Council Votes to Keep Angus McMillan Monuments'.

99 Auntie Doris Paton, Jessica Horton and Beth Marsden, 'Telling the Truth about Gippsland's History', accessed 28 May 2021, overland.org.au/2020/10/telling-the-truth-about-gippslands-history/.

100 Sentance, "A Matter of History", 4.

101 Victorian Government, 'Truth and Justice in Victoria', 7 April 2022, accessed 26 May 2022, www.aboriginal.vic.gov.au/truth-and-justice. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada has applied public history practices in re-storying settler historical narratives, see Cornthassel, Cha-win-is and T'lakwadzi, 'Indigenous Storytelling, Truth-Telling, and Community Approaches to Reconciliation'.

The failed motion to remove two cairns dedicated to Angus McMillan shows that different historical narratives are used to serve conflicting priorities held within the Wellington Shire community. As we have shown, in the 1920s different settler communities imbued the cairns with localised meanings that may have been divergent from the agenda of the Memorials Committee. Submissions to the WSC ahead of the vote show some local settlers may continue to see cairns in their own personal ways. Yet what the submissions also reveal is that settler pride in exploration and colonisation, and the desire to maintain memorialisation of a known murderer, remains strong. That many in the settler community feel so keenly that these cairns, built in 1926 and not yet 100 years old, should remain permanent fixtures in the landscape exposes the tenuousness of settler belonging that, as Moreton-Robinson suggests, is ‘unsettled’ by the truths of colonial history.¹⁰² Meanwhile, as we have shown here, contests over the narrative of the McMillan cairns are underway. Taken together, testimonies given to the WSC, letters and petitions, the hanging of Aboriginal flags and graffiti on the cairns, and the public education efforts of Gunaikurnai people constitute ongoing counter-narratives that continue the efforts of those before them, like Uncle Albert Mullett, to challenge metanarratives of colonisation. To conclude we return to the words at the beginning of this article. While some community members of the Wellington Shire continue to express their ownership of the cairns, Aunty Doris sees the irony in this, reflected in the words of her son, Steaphan Paton, featured in his 2014 multimedia art installation ‘Wallung Githa’:

Wallung Githa Unsettled – Nindidana Wallung – our stones. Thindu wurk-wurk githa – This land is mine. Thindu wallung githa – These rocks are mine.¹⁰³

These words move beyond memorialisation and contests over cairns. This declaration of sovereignty of Gunaikurnai Country, and of the stones used to build memorials to McMillan in 1926, lay bare the folly of attempts to make settler colonial spaces legitimate through such methods.

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¹⁰³ Paton, ‘Wallung Githa Unsettled’.

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Asserting Aboriginal polity and nationhood: The campaign for the return of Indigenous Ancestral Remains

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Abstract: Mapping the history of the repatriation movement in Australia, this article will argue that the movement to repatriate Ancestral Remains was an expression of Aboriginal nation-building and self-determination. Indigenous remains were collected in Australia over at least 180 years in the name of discovery, in the purported interest of science and anthropology, as ‘trophy of empire’ or as ‘curios’ of a supposedly ‘dying race’. The demand for the return of Ancestral Remains has been led by Indigenous peoples. Their abiding interest to recover Ancestors held in institutions in Australia and overseas has been a long campaign. Aboriginal organisations were a critical interface advocating the return of Ancestral Remains to government and institutions, challenging museums and applying political pressure. As Indigenous rights claims developed, the newly emerging Aboriginal forms of government made repatriation of Ancestral Remains a central focus. In asserting Indigenous power, identity reclamation and responsibility to the dead, these claims posed significant provocations to the history, role and purpose of collecting institutions. Legislative, institutional and political responses to Aboriginal claims for repatriation in Australia will be explored, as well as the current proposal to establish a National Resting Place to provide a long-term, Indigenous-centred response to the care of Ancestral Remains.

Introduction

The collecting of Indigenous Ancestral Remains began in the opening days and weeks of colonial contact and continued with different motivations and outcomes over a near 200-year period. These bodies, robbed from old and more recent burials and from morgues, were taken without consent and against the wishes of their descendants and mourners. Then and since, descendants variously resisted and ultimately forged a reckoning with those institutions that hold their Ancestors *to bring them home*. The challenges posed by Aboriginal repatriation claims have given rise to legislative, institutional and political responses in Australia and now the establishment of a National Resting Place as a long-term, Indigenous-centred approach to the care of Ancestral Remains. In this paper we consider the politics that underpinned the movement for repatriation of Ancestral Remains and argue that the Indigenous labour to return Ancestral Remains that is most readily aligned with the broader political agenda of self-determination gives expression to something much deeper – the assertion of Aboriginal polity and nationhood.

The demand for the return of Ancestral Remains has been a movement led by Indigenous peoples. This abiding interest to recover Ancestors held in institutions in Australia and overseas has been a long campaign: its history is as long as the acts of collecting.¹ Aboriginal organisations were a critical interface advocating the return of Ancestral Remains to government and institutions. Many delegations led by Indigenous peoples challenged museums and compelled politicians to support the return of Ancestral Remains. Mapping the history of the repatriation movement in Australia, this article will argue that the movement to repatriate Ancestral Remains was an expression of Aboriginal polity and nation-building.² As Indigenous rights claims developed, the newly emerging Aboriginal forms of government made repatriation of Ancestral Remains a central focus. In asserting responsibility to the dead, Aboriginal people are asserting that their identity and culture survive and continue within the life of the settler state. These assertions posed significant provocations to the history, role and purpose of collecting institutions.³

1 Lyndon Ormond-Parker, interview with Heidi Norman, 22 June 2020.

2 By nation-building we are adapting the terminology developed by scholars to explain processes of 'acting like a nation' and efforts to reconstitute in social, economic and cultural terms Aboriginal sovereignty within the life of the nation state. See Cornell, 'Processes of Native Nationhood', 1–27.

3 See, for example, Cubillo, 'Repatriating Our Ancestors'; Fforde, *Collecting the Dead* and 'From Edinburgh University to the Ngarrindjeri Nation, South Australia'; Fforde and Ormond-Parker, 'Repatriation Developments in the UK'; Griffin, 'Previous Possessions, New Obligations'; Hallgren, 'Eric Mjöberg and the Rhetorics of Human Remains'; Moreton, 'The Legacies of the Repatriation of Human Remains'; Pickering, 'Rewards and Frustrations'; Turnbull, "'Ramsay's Regime'", 'Managing and Mapping the History of Collecting Indigenous Human Remains', and *Science, Museums and Collecting the Indigenous Dead in Colonial Australia*. How Australian museums have responded to Indigenous demands for repatriation has been carefully detailed by leading scholars and practitioners in the sector and is therefore not the focus of this paper.

The broad overlapping patterns of collecting Ancestral Remains that occurred over time were undertaken by motivated individuals, mostly working with scientific institutions. Remains were collected in the name of discovery, in the purported interest of science and anthropology, as ‘trophies of empire’ or as ‘curios’ of a supposedly ‘dying race’. Western institutions in Australia and across the world – including museums, universities, academic societies and medical training facilities – held, and continue to hold, thousands of Ancestral Remains. There are also an unknown number of remains in private hands. The core fascination that underpinned collecting relates to the search for the ‘missing link’ in human evolution and a hierarchy that placed Indigenous peoples in Australia at the bottom of the evolutionary scale, thus giving rise to racial typologies and methodologies, later described as ‘scientific racism’. Colonial families were sometimes the inheritors of Indigenous Ancestral Remains, perhaps taken as trophies and curios supporting their own ancestors’ newly claimed place over landscapes; narratives about Aboriginal people as a ‘dying race’ helped absolve settlers’ guilt over dispossession.⁴

The struggle for repatriation

Although repatriation gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, it has a much longer history, reflecting long-held Indigenous concerns about the removal of the dead.⁵ By the 1970s, as Aboriginal people were organising locally and nationally for land and a ‘rightful place’ in the political life of the nation, campaigns for the return of Ancestral Remains gathered pace. Self-determination policy, adopted from the end of 1972, commenced government funding for an autonomous Aboriginal service and representation realm; these organisations were a critical interface advocating the return of Ancestral Remains to government and institutions. At this time repatriation demands were also gaining momentum in other countries with colonial pasts to confront, such as the United States, Canada and New Zealand. The movement saw Indigenous peoples in these nations reclaim authority over the remains of their ancestors.⁶ Direct approaches to institutions proved most effective in these early stages, with important government support coming later. The repatriation movement began in earnest in Australia in the 1970s with the campaign for the return of Truganini’s remains from the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.⁷ The 1980s saw several key repatriation cases, including the Murray Black Collection from the University of Melbourne⁸ and international repatriation from the University of Edinburgh.⁹

4 Brantlinger, ‘Dark Vanishings’.

5 See, for example, Fforde, *Collecting the Dead*; Turnbull, ‘Indigenous Australian People, Their Defence of the Dead and Native Title’, 63–86; Hallgren, ‘Eric Mjöberg and the Rhetorics of Human Remains’, 135–44.

6 Seideman, ‘Bones of Contentment’, 545–88; Herewini, ‘The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongerawa’, 405–6; Aranui, ‘Restitution or a Loss to Science?’, 19–29.

7 Turnbull, ‘Managing and Mapping the History of Collecting Indigenous Human Remains’.

8 Faulkhead and Berg, *Power and the Passion*; Pickering, ‘Where Are the Stories?’, 79–95.

9 Fforde and Ormond-Parker, ‘Repatriation Developments in the UK’.

When Tasmanian Aboriginal man Michael Mansell wrote in 1986 to the Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCS) seeking repatriation, the RCS replied explaining the absence of a policy on repatriation and the personal view that remains were valuable 'teaching material', but that 'human remains of ethnic groups which worship their ancestors should, however, be given special consideration'.¹⁰ This correspondence, as Morton argues, reveals the tensions inherent in the repatriation debate: on the one hand, the conceptualisation of human remains as specimens and evidence, and on the other, the concept of these remains as ancestors. Morton suggests this correspondence from Michael Mansell in 1986 impacted the way museum curators thought about groups of remains. In December 2001, the RCS agreed to return all human remains of Tasmanian Aboriginal origin they held to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community.¹¹ The repatriation of the remains took place in April 2002 and consisted of five bones that had been prepared and bound for traditional use, one skull and a slide of the hair and skin of Truganini.¹² The repatriation pursued by the Tasmanian Aboriginal community addressed their alarm that these remains were taken against the express wishes of their people and for the purposes of proving the 'missing link' in the human chain. The narrative of their elimination, the 'last of their tribe', made Tasmanian Aboriginal remains valuable commodities in the auction houses and to collecting institutions. In asserting the return of their Ancestors, Palawa people were working to restore the dignity of the dead and assert their own survival. While other repatriations have followed, an important point to note here is that many remains are yet to find their way home, and instead are held in limbo in other museums, albeit now ones located in Australia. Many museums are reluctant to now hold Indigenous Ancestral Remains and are not sure why they still have them. In some instances there is complexity around the distinction between 'object', 'artefact' and human or 'Ancestor' – where crania are, for example, made into drinking vessels.

Calls for repatriation of Ancestral Remains were gaining momentum at a time when they had been of limited if any scientific interest since their collection, although as we discuss below, Ancestral Remains were at this time newly becoming the focus of scientists seeking to apply emerging technologies to resolve debates about the origins of modern humans. When the repatriation of the Ancestral Remains collected from the Kimberley region in the Swedish scientific expedition of 1910–11 was requested, the museum discovered that they had been sent to an osteological institute in the 1960s. The eventual records to support the repatriation request revealed that not only were the Ancestral Remains of no current scientific interest, but they had never been of scientific use since they were first collected in 1910–11.¹³

10 Correspondence cited in Morton, 'The Legacies of the Repatriation of Human Remains from the Royal College of Surgeons', 13–14.

11 Morton, 'The Legacies of the Repatriation of Human Remains from the Royal College of Surgeons', 12.

12 Morton, 'The Legacies of the Repatriation of Human Remains', 15.

13 Hallgren, 'Eric Mjöberg and the Rhetorics of Human Remains', 136. Hallgren notes one exception, a dentist who 'collected various skulls from different parts of the world to do research on their teeth'; 'the results of this research could not be located'.

The return of remains is complicated by the original act of procurement and how those collections came to be stored, as museum practices and motivations for research and collecting have shifted. This is evident in the example of the repatriation of Ancestral Remains from the Anatomy Department of Edinburgh University in Scotland. While the intention was to return the collection in 1991, it later emerged that the substantial return amounted to but a small part of a much larger collection. As Cressida Fforde documents in her longstanding work and advocacy in this area,¹⁴ it was originally estimated that the university had acquired 300 sets of remains dating from the early nineteenth century. Eventually, 87 individuals were returned to the Larrakia people in Darwin and 300 Ancestors to Ngarrindjeri people in South Australia. In effect this represented just 40 per cent of the collection; further research located some 603 individuals.¹⁵ This example illustrates how the classification of Ancestral Remains, into, for example cranial, and postcranial categories, was collapsed from the late 1940s as collections were aggregated in the postwar period. This aggregation of Ancestral Remains, and the sale and shifting of collections to different institutions, has contributed to further loss of recording about the origins of those remains.

The provocations and possibilities posed by Ancestral Remains

First Peoples have posed a significant provocation to collecting institutions. There have been significant challenges (and refusals) to repatriation requests, but collaboration between community groups and museums has led to many success stories in Australia, leading to the repatriation of remains from the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Sweden, Germany, Netherlands, Ireland, Austria and Czech Republic, among others.¹⁶ Ongoing research continues to reveal the holding of Ancestral Remains in public institutions in many more nations. As the Australian Government's repatriation of Ancestral Remains data reveals, repatriation of Ancestral Remains is underway from many institutions across the globe.¹⁷

As the movement for the repatriation of Ancestral Remains was gaining momentum, two key developments were emerging. One was that First Peoples' assertion of connection to Ancestral Remains as family, rather than as objects, posed serious provocations to the collecting history and the organisation of knowledge within museums, universities and medico-scientific institutions. These institutions were challenged to account for the treatment of Aboriginal Ancestral Remains as objects, their role in colonial history and

14 See Fforde, 'From Edinburgh University to the Ngarrindjeri Nation', 41–47.

15 Cubillo, 'Repatriating Our Ancestors', 23.

16 For a detailed examination of the history of repatriation from a range of countries see Fforde, *Collecting the Dead*; Fforde, 'From Edinburgh University to the Ngarrindjeri Nation', 41–47; Pickering and Gordon, 'Repatriation: The End of the Beginning'; Hemming and Wilson, 'The First "Stolen Generations"', 183–98; Gustafsson Reinius, 'The Ritual Labour of Reconciliation'; Roginski, *The Hanged Man and the Body Thief*; Sullivan, Kelly and Gordon, 'Museums and Indigenous Peoples in Australia', 208–27.

17 See Australian Government, 'International Repatriation', accessed 30 May 2022, www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/cultural-heritage/indigenous-repatriation/international-repatriation.

their responsibility to restore familial relations. From the 1990s collecting institutions in Australia, with a few exceptions, accepted the return of Ancestral Remains and began reviewing their policies and building relationships with Aboriginal communities, however, an anti-repatriation argument was made by some, who argued that museums are giving up their longstanding cultural authority to protect material culture should they engage in repatriation.¹⁸ Some museums have expressed concern that their holdings would be significantly diminished if they started to give material back to Traditional Owners. Historically, this has been strong in the UK, although there has been a shift towards facilitating repatriations from several key institutions in recent years.¹⁹ Shifting museum practice has increasingly comprehended the problems associated with classifying Ancestral Remains and other items as 'objects' disassociated from the people who are connected to them. Museums increasingly appreciate the benefits of building relationships with community, and thus, rather than repatriation being viewed as 'loss', it is understood as an opportunity to gain knowledge through exchange and to develop ongoing relationships.²⁰ 'Objects' are therefore being transformed through the process of repatriation.

The second key development emerged with the rise of genetic research in the last decades of the twentieth century, seen in initiatives such as the Human Genome Project, leading scientists to assert a new interest in Ancestral Remains. Observing earlier accounts that showed very little interest in the remains that had been held in institutions for decades, new technology created a new, or perhaps more accurately first, scientific interest in the study of Ancestral Remains. Whereas earlier research on Ancestral Remains sought to prove theories of evolution and racial hierarchy, scientists now announced research about the origins of modern humans and argued that the remains belonged 'to all mankind'.²¹ A key debate emerged between scientists, who felt their disciplines were under threat should Ancestral Remains be reburied, and Indigenous people, who asserted their right to bury their Ancestors.²² Some scholars have sought to find middle ground between these two poles, noting Indigenous participation and interest in archaeology,²³ while others argue that the remains have only been used infrequently in scientific studies,²⁴ and that much of this research is biased by the poor record-keeping and collection methods of the era in which remains were stolen.²⁵

18 See, for example, Jenkins, *Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections*; Jenkins, 'Who Are We to Decide?'.
 19 Fforde and Ormond-Parker, 'Repatriation Developments in the UK'; Rimmer, "'Travelling Bones'"; Morton, 'The Legacies of the Repatriation of Human Remains'.

20 Esme Ward, 'The Tide of Change: An Open Letter from Our Director Esme Ward', The University of Manchester, undated, accessed 26 May 2020, www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/about/thetideofchange/.
 21 Morton 'The Legacies of the Repatriation of Human Remains', p. 76.

22 Lewin, *Bones of Contention*; Mulvaney, 'Past Regained, Future Lost'; Donlon, 'Aboriginal Skeletal Collections'; Turnbull, 'The Vermillion Accord'.

23 See, for example, Pardoe, 'Repatriation, Reburial, and Biological Research in Australia'; Wilson, 'Indigenous Research and Archaeology'.

24 Russell, 'Reflections on Murray Black's Writings'; Jones, 'Medical Schools and Aboriginal Bodies'.

25 Robertson, 'Sources of Bias in the Murray Black Collection'.

A key debate in assessing repatriation claims concerns notions of kinship, and on what basis claims-making groups assert remains as their Ancestors. There have been instances where museums have refused repatriation without proof of direct lineage.²⁶ Western notions of kinship based primarily on genetic descent were challenged by repatriation movements that put forward ideas regarding a ‘continuous culture’, underpinned by notions of geographical, social and spiritual connection. Notably, this meant that the strength of one’s relationship to one’s Ancestors was not undermined by the age of the remains.²⁷

Some professions – anatomy, physical anthropology and archaeology – resisted repatriation and appeared to have difficulty comprehending Indigenous demands for remains that had been held for many decades.²⁸ Archaeologist Colin Pardoe describes the impact of Aboriginal demands for ‘control, accountability and recognition’ as having a ‘cyclonic impact’ on archaeology, which continued to have interest in working on remains,²⁹ and the Australian Archaeological Association publicly defended their members who they felt were wrongly accused of Victorian-era scientific racism by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre and the Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action in media discourse.³⁰ Prominent researchers such as eminent archaeologist John Mulvaney questioned the motives of repatriation activists, labelling their interests political, while others disparaged repatriation interests as ‘black creationism’, failing to comprehend that repatriation was motivated by customary obligations to one’s Ancestors.³¹

Navigating the minefield: Legislative, institutional and political responses to repatriation

Since early colonial times, human remains have been a marketable commodity. The Anatomy Acts put in place at state level between the 1860s and 1880s legislated that bodies must be disposed of according to a set of guidelines, such as needing to be buried in a proper coffin in consecrated ground.³² However, this legislation was ambiguous, and did not account for ‘parts’ of bodies. As a result, a trade in these materials developed between collectors in Australia, as well as between Australian and overseas collectors, particularly in Europe, where Aboriginal skulls and skeletal material generated significant interest among the intellectual networks in the medico-scientific communities.³³

26 Fforde and Ormond-Parker, ‘Repatriation Developments in the UK’.

27 Faulkhead and Berg, *Power and the Passion*; Hubert, ‘Dry Bones or Living Ancestors?’; Krmpotich, ‘Remembering and Repatriation’.

28 Turnbull, ‘The Vermillion Accord’, 117.

29 Pardoe, ‘Eye of the Storm’, 16.

30 Turnbull, ‘The Vermillion Accord’.

31 Atkinson quoted in Morton, ‘The Legacies of the Repatriation of Human Remains from the Royal College of Surgeons’, 75; Mulvaney, ‘Past Regained, Future Lost’.

32 Macdonald, ‘A Body Buried Is a Body Wasted’.

33 See Turnbull, ‘“Ramsay’s Regime” and *Science, Museums and Collecting the Indigenous Dead*’.

While much of this trade in body parts appears to have been a gift economy, there were instances of purchasing Indigenous remains. Furthermore, anatomy legislation was commonly ignored, and rarely led to punitive action against those who transgressed the law.³⁴ The law prescribes no ownership in a body or corpse, but there are instances where proprietary interests can be established, namely where the skill of a preparator has turned the body, or associated biological material, into something else, or there is a conceptual or physical detachment that renders it different to the original form of the body.³⁵ These aspects of the law have been used to assert ownership of Ancestral Remains and, in some cases, to facilitate successful repatriation.³⁶

As Indigenous rights claims gained greater audibility and resources, the newly emerging Aboriginal forms of government, such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and its support for the Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action, made repatriation of Ancestral Remains a central focus. These claims posed significant provocations to the history, role and purpose of collecting institutions and prompted them to develop protocols and policies guiding repatriation from the 1980s.

In the 1980s in particular, legislation and policies were enacted governing the trade in human remains. States and territories amended nineteenth-century Anatomy Acts to reflect changing practices; trade in human tissues was only permitted in certain instances for therapeutic reasons.³⁷ Around the same time, legislation specifically relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander remains served to limit the trade and movement of these materials. The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984* (Cth) did not cover human remains already held within museums and private collections; but since the 1980s, museums put in place policies to prevent the acquisition of and trade in Ancestral Remains. The *Archaeological and Aboriginal Relics Preservation Act 1972* (Vic.) was amended in May 1984 to insert Section 26B, concerning skeletal remains pre- and post-1834; an institution's right to the possession of collected Aboriginal remains was lost upon the enactment of this amendment, although some institutions, such as the Museum of Victoria, were granted exemptions and continued to act as a legal custodian of such remains.

At the international level, an emerging area of international human rights law relevant to the issue of Ancestral Remains has been whether the dead have human rights. Currently, the legal trend is towards recognising more rights of deceased persons; 'dignity and autonomy are the driving forces behind the creation of many posthumous legal rights'.³⁸ The dead are recognised as having 'the right to be treated with dignity'.³⁹

34 See MacDonald, 'Reading the "Foreign Skull"', 'A Scandalous Act' and 'A Body Buried Is a Body Wasted'; Turnbull, "Ramsay's Regime" and *Science, Museums and Collecting the Indigenous Dead*.

35 Davies, 'Property Rights in Human Remains and Artefacts'; Falconer, 'Dismantling Doodeward'.

36 Mansell, 'The War of the Dead'; Falconer, 'Dismantling Doodeward'.

37 *State Human Tissue and Transplantation Acts* (Vic, NSW, SA, WA, SA) between 1980 and 1985.

38 Smolensky, "Rights of the Dead", 775.

39 Moon, 'Human Rights, Human Remains', 11.

International law conventions pertaining to identifying human remains, appropriate burial practices in keeping with the belief systems of the deceased, return to family and the respectful treatment of human remains are applicable to Ancestral Remains; international law also dictates that the cultural beliefs and practices of Indigenous peoples need to be considered and respected wherever possible. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) also confirms at Article 12 ‘the right to the repatriation of their human remains’.⁴⁰

Changes to museum policy and practice

In ‘Repatriating Our Ancestors: Who Will Speak for the Dead?’, Franchesca Cubillo reflected on her longstanding work in museums on the repatriation of Ancestral Remains. Cubillo highlighted that museums in Australia have been involved in repatriation since the late 1980s, but that the effectiveness of repatriation initiatives is mixed and the measure of ‘success’ is unclear; she argues that the process was hampered in the initial stages by a lack of national coordination.

Cubillo writes of her excitement of working at this time at the South Australian Museum as they were commencing the process of negotiating and building relations with community for repatriation; she describes the museum being ‘in the midst of the process of developing new and productive relationships with Indigenous people’.⁴¹ At this time the development of policies governing the repatriation of ‘Indigenous Human Remains’ and the repatriation of ‘Restricted Secret/Sacred objects’ commenced. The development of these two documents provided ‘best practice standards’ for engaging with Indigenous people in relation to the two collections. A key factor, according to Cubillo, was for museums to be receptive to community requests for repatriation of their Ancestors and for repatriation to be unconditional.

One limitation was the lack of capacity and personnel on the part of museums to oversee repatriation. Museums were under no obligation to employ staff to work on repatriation, conduct inventory research and work with community. Cubillo describes the repatriation of Australian collections of Ancestral Remains commencing in an ad hoc and uncoordinated way. It was reactionary and largely subsidised within the budgets of state museums. Notwithstanding the intention and earnest interest and goodwill of board members and staff to facilitate repatriation, ‘it really was not the best approach to take’.⁴² Other countries were setting better standards.

In the United States, repatriation was developing in a more organised way. American Indians successfully worked with US Congress to pass the National Museum of the American Indian Act in 1989. This law made reference to both human remains

40 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted 13 September 2007, www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html.

41 Cubillo, ‘Repatriating Our Ancestors’, 21.

42 Cubillo, ‘Repatriating Our Ancestors’, 21.

and 'funerary' objects. It required the Smithsonian Institute, in consultation with communities, to research the holdings and contact the relevant community notifying them of the collection. The National Museum of the American Indian Act 1989 was followed in 1990 by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. These laws mandated the process for repatriation of human remains, funerary objects and objects of cultural patrimony, along with ownership protection of Indigenous materials revealed on federal and tribal lands to their ancestral community.⁴³

Museums, prompted by the provocation from Aboriginal activists, were developing policies for the return of human remains held in their collections. For example, in 1972 the Queensland Museum made the decision to no longer accept newly disinterred Indigenous remains.⁴⁴ Other museums followed. In 1993, the Council of Australian Museum Associations launched a policy document entitled 'Previous Possessions, New Obligations: Policies for Museums in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples'.⁴⁵ By 2005, this policy developed into principles and guidelines for Australian museums working with Indigenous cultural heritage, titled 'Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities'.⁴⁶

Many with experience in the repatriation and museum governance area highlight the informality and 'goodwill' that informed the repatriation process in Australia, rather than a legislative framework. This also accounts for the very different approaches to repatriation adopted by the states and by individual museums. Cubillo flags the need for more effective policies and dedicated personnel and funding to ensure a more effective and efficient repatriation process. The National Museum of Australia has a dedicated unit focused specifically on repatriation that supports, among other things, the writing of a report to assist the repatriation process and ceremonies. One key criticism that Cubillo notes is that, in contrast, most state-level museums respond to repatriation and research requests from operational budgets and without dedicated specialist staff.⁴⁷ While repatriation can be expensive, the cost of not repatriating also needs to be considered, which as Turnbull explains includes 'devaluing cultural practices which are fundamental to the indigenous Australian continuum of self, life in the land and eventual return to the realm of the spirit'.⁴⁸ A second area where improvement is required is in relation to communication and coordination across the museum sector⁴⁹ and the GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) sector more broadly⁵⁰ in their repatriation work. As Cubillo notes, Aboriginal communities are approached sporadically by museums to take receipt of their Ancestors' remains.

43 Cubillo, 'Repatriating Our Ancestors', 21.

44 Ormond-Parker, 'A Commonwealth Repatriation Odyssey'.

45 Museums Australia, *Previous Possessions, New Obligations*.

46 Museums Australia, *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities*.

47 Cubillo, 'Repatriating Our Ancestors'.

48 Turnbull, 'Indigenous Australian People, Their Defence of the Dead and Native Title', 64.

49 Cubillo, 'Repatriating Our Ancestors'.

50 Thorpe, Faulkhead and Booker, 'Transforming the Archive'.

The possibility of a coordinated repatriation process, rather than proceeding on an ad hoc basis institution-by-institution, would prove less of a strain on community and be more cost effective for the sector.⁵¹

Managed by the South Australian Museum, the first national approach to repatriation emerged with the National Skeletal Provenancing Project in 1995. The intention of the project was to provide federal and state governments with an inventory of collections and the locations from which remains were procured. For this work the South Australian Museum examined every set of human remains held by Australian museums alongside the related archival records. While this research was completed, Cubillo contends that it did not inform policy or emerge as a useful Aboriginal community resource to aid the return of Ancestors.⁵²

The federal government committed resources to support repatriation of human remains with the commencement of the 1998 Return of Indigenous Cultural Property (RICP) program. The program was initially funded from 2000 for a period of three years with a \$3 million budget. The RICP recognised the need to engage and assist with repatriation efforts that included funding for provenancing and repatriation in a culturally appropriate way. Cubillo highlights that RICP-funded projects were managed independently by the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts and there appeared to be a gap in the working relations with and across museums to work together to coordinate their repatriation efforts. The result, as Cubillo observes, is that Indigenous communities were potentially engaging with multiple institutions simultaneously.⁵³

The repatriation of Ancestral Remains in Australia has been driven by an 'evolved philosophy' within activism, the museum industry, and explicit support through policies at federal and state level, rather than dedicated legislation.⁵⁴ Encompassing state and federal legislation as well as policy and professional guidelines concerning the repatriation of Ancestral Remains, the broad sweep of responses has been characterised as a 'minefield' given the complexity and spatial overlay.⁵⁵ There is, however, a generally progressive mindset towards repatriation in Australia.

51 Cubillo, 'Repatriating Our Ancestors'.

52 Cubillo, 'Repatriating Our Ancestors', 22.

53 Cubillo, 'Repatriating Our Ancestors', 22.

54 See Pickering, 'Dance through the Minefield', 'Rewards and Frustrations', and 'Where Are the Stories?'; Feikert, 'Repatriation of Historic Human Remains'; Galloway, 'Legal Grey Area Hinders Aboriginal Repatriation'; Smith, 'The Repatriation of Human Remains'; Griffin, 'Previous Possessions, New Obligations'; Truscott, 'Repatriation of Indigenous Cultural Property'; Sullivan, Kelly and Gordon, 'Museums and Indigenous People in Australia'.

55 Pickering, 'Dance through the Minefield'. Pickering argues that 'The mines represent the ethical and legal codes of various professions, institutions, governments, and indeed, individuals, usually discovered only in the transgression', p. 256.

Political responses to the repatriation of Ancestral Remains

The return of Ancestral Remains has been led by Indigenous peoples. In 1990, for example, Aboriginal men Michael Mansell, Lionel Fogarty and Karno Walker formed a delegation to the United Kingdom to take possession of Ancestral Remains from the Australian Embassy in Dublin, Peterborough City Museum, Bradford Museum and Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. While in the United Kingdom, they picketed the London Natural History Museum. Later that year, in September, Bob Weatherall, Monty Prior and William Toby repatriated Ancestral Remains from Glasgow Museum and Art Gallery. The following year, in 1991, Bob Weatherall returned to the UK as part of a delegation led by Elder and lawman David Mowaljarlai to collect the remains of some 300 skulls from the University of Edinburgh in what turned out to be the beginning of large-scale repatriation.⁵⁶ The many delegations by Indigenous peoples continued to challenge museums and – with the accompanying media interest – pressure politicians.

As the repatriation of Ancestral Remains pushed collecting institutions to develop policy, the political and legislative response has developed, albeit slowly. Proclamations made in 1911 and 1913 had placed some restrictions on the export of Aboriginal remains, which resulted in more Ancestral Remains staying in Australian museums and scientific institutes. Continuing up until the 1980s, police, land holders and archaeologists brought Ancestral Remains to those holding institutions.⁵⁷ As the Indigenous service and representative self-determination realm grew from the 1970s, direct petitioning of collecting institutions facilitated repatriation of Ancestors. The passing of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act in part acknowledged Indigenous rights and interests in Ancestral Remains, making reference to ‘prescribed authority’s’ safekeeping of Ancestral Remains if they cannot ‘return the remains to an Aboriginal [organisation or family] ... willing to accept, possession, custody or control of the remains’.⁵⁸

At the same time, Aboriginal community-led responses were emerging. In one example, Gunditjmara Elder and former chief executive officer of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Jim Berg worked to secure the memorial site in the heart Melbourne for the burial of unprovenanced Koorie Ancestral Remains in November 1985.⁵⁹ The reburial ceremony saw a procession of some 200 Koories from across Victoria carrying the 38 sets of bark-wrapped remains to the memorial.⁶⁰

Greater coordination of Aboriginal community approaches to institutions began to emerge in 1987 when an Aboriginal Community Liaison Program was run in conjunction with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

56 Ormond-Parker, interview with Heidi Norman, 22 June 2020.

57 Fforde et al., “Inhuman and Very Mischievous Traffic”.

58 *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984*, subsection 21(1).

59 Berg, ‘This Is My Journey’, 22.

60 Berg, ‘This Is My Journey’, 24–26.

Studies (AIATSIS). This program, led by Steven Webb, raised the concept of a government-funded, Indigenous-run 'keeping place'.⁶¹ This followed several 'keeping places' being developed, such as at Shepparton, and in New South Wales, Local Aboriginal Land Councils were also showing interest in 'keeping places' as they dedicated space for reburying Ancestral Remains.⁶² With the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in 1991, significant development in advocacy, institutional support and policy reform relating to repatriation of Ancestral Remains occurred. ATSIC was the leading agency in Australia for the return from overseas of Indigenous human remains, and, along with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), carried out the federal government's responsibilities for the return of significant Indigenous human remains from overseas collecting institutions,⁶³ up until ATSIC's disestablishment in 2004–5.

By 1993 ATSIC had drafted a national policy on the protection and return of significant cultural property to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The draft policy recognised Indigenous peoples' ownership rights and cultural obligations in relation to property held by collecting institutions, and called for governments to advocate on behalf of Indigenous peoples for the return of cultural property held in Australian and overseas public and private collections.⁶⁴ This was further developed as the National Principles for the Return of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Property (1993), which included that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have access to reasonable facilities and places for the safekeeping of repatriated significant cultural property.⁶⁵

The Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action (FAIRA) had long been advocating for repatriation, and ATSIC commissioned them to broaden their work beyond Queensland to the national and international level.⁶⁶ This included research to document and catalogue Indigenous human remains held in British and European institutions, assisting Indigenous communities with repatriation issues, ongoing work in the UK negotiating the return of Ancestral Remains, and further consultation. The return of the University of Edinburgh collection was an initial and significant repatriation that ATSIC supported.⁶⁷ By 1994 FAIRA identified the need for a national keeping place for unprovenanced and other Ancestral Remains. As the Native Title Social Justice package was being negotiated, ATSIC advocated a national policy for the protection and return of significant cultural property from federal and state collecting institutions, making specific reference to 'Human skeletal remains,

61 Webb, 'Aboriginal Human Remains: Policy Statement'.

62 Norman, *'What Do We Want?'*.

63 Australian Government, Memorandum submitted to the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport.

64 Janke, *Our Culture: Our Future*, 243.

65 Cited in Janke, *Our Culture: Our Future*, 245.

66 Ormond-Parker, interview with Heidi Norman, 22 June 2020.

67 Hanchant, 'Practicalities in the Return of Remains', 314–15.

tissue material and burial artefacts'.⁶⁸ Over this period ATSIC consulted widely on its policy on the return of human remains and in 1997 found a National Resting Place was 'wholeheartedly supported by Indigenous organisations'.⁶⁹

One pivotal moment where repatriation of Ancestral Remains came to prominence on the international political stage was in July 2000, when the British and Australian governments agreed to facilitate repatriation of Indigenous materials held by government-funded museums and universities in the United Kingdom. On the occasion of this shared announcement with British prime minister Tony Blair, Australian prime minister John Howard agreed to 'increase efforts to repatriate human remain to Australian Indigenous communities'.⁷⁰ The joint statement recognised the 'special connection that indigenous people have with ancestral remains' and committed both countries to develop a 'cooperative' and 'coordinated long-term approach by governments involving Indigenous communities and collecting institutions'.⁷¹ The agreement outlined consultation with Indigenous organisations, including their aspirations regarding the treatment of the remains and a means for addressing these, and future work to catalogue Indigenous human remains in public institutions. The British Natural History Museum had already catalogued the 450 Indigenous human remains in its collection and provided this information to the Australian Government. The announcement saw the creation of a working group that invited submissions regarding repatriation, and the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport heard extensive evidence, including from the FAIRA representative then living in the UK, Lyndon Ormond-Parker. The report from this select committee, tabled in the British Parliament, called for policy reform supporting reparation where collecting institutions agreed. Importantly, as Fforde and Ormond-Parker emphasise, this was a critical moment whereby the repatriation of Ancestral Remains was elevated to the political arena.⁷²

Back in Australia, in August 2000 the Australian Cultural Ministers Council developed the Strategic Plan for the Return of Indigenous Ancestral Remains.⁷³ The Cultural Ministers Council committed \$3 million over three years to support the return of Ancestral Remains and secret/sacred objects via grants and had four main objectives, including to:

- identify the origins of all ancestral remains and secret/sacred objects held in the museums where possible
- notify communities who have ancestral remains and secret/sacred objects held in the museums

⁶⁸ Cited in Janke, *Our Culture: Our Future*, 245.

⁶⁹ Cited in Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation, *National Resting Place Consultation Report*, 4.

⁷⁰ Cited in Fforde and Ormond-Parker, 'Repatriation Developments in the UK'.

⁷¹ Australian Government, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 'Joint Statement with Tony Blair on Aboriginal Remains', PM Transcripts, 4 July 2000, pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-11611.

⁷² Fforde and Ormond-Parker, 'Repatriation Developments in the UK'.

⁷³ Fforde and Ormond-Parker, 'Repatriation Developments in the UK'.

- appropriately store ancestral remains and secret/sacred objects held in the museums at the request of the relevant community
- and arrange for repatriation where and when requested.⁷⁴

The work of the RICP program was extended until 2007, but with no extra funding. A further extension was announced at the 2007 budget for four years with \$4.7 million additional funding. This followed new research estimating that the eight major Australian museums participating in the RICP held 7,070 Ancestral Remains.⁷⁵

ATSIC continued to undertake advocacy and representation in relation to Ancestral Remains. In 2001, ATSIC policy was amended to state its support for 'a national Indigenous repository for unprovenanced cultural property'. This was followed up by the 'service' arm (known as ATSIIS) commissioning the National Museum of Australia to undertake consultation on options regarding the storage and disposal of poorly provenanced Ancestral Remains.⁷⁶ In 2005, Prime Minister John Howard, operating without a structured Aboriginal voice to government following the abolition of ATSIC, and with growing Aboriginal community frustration, requested advice on how best to respond in a culturally appropriate way in the future to the repatriation of Ancestral Remains where provenance was uncertain. The federal Indigenous affairs minister appointed an Indigenous Repatriation Reference Committee in 2006 although the committee's term expired with the community consultation process still to get underway.⁷⁷

In 2009, the Office of Evaluation and Audit released its Performance Audit of the International Repatriation Program and also noted the need for greater coordination, resources and management arrangements for unprovenanced Ancestral Remains.⁷⁸ Further recommendations included financial and other resources to support community care for Ancestral Remains and long-term management arrangements for unprovenanced remains. In the following years, a new Australian Government Indigenous Repatriation Policy was announced (2010–11) that consolidated the domestic and international repatriation programs and new Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation to Government on repatriation issues.⁷⁹ Commencing work in 2012, the group agreed that the current arrangements for poorly provenanced Ancestral Remains were not culturally acceptable, endorsing the view 'that museums are not an appropriate location for holding poorly provenanced ancestral remains'.⁸⁰ The advisory committee released a discussion paper in 2013 seeking views on the

74 Truscott, 'Repatriation of Indigenous Cultural Property'.

75 Australian Government, 'Budget 2007–08 Indigenous Affairs: Extension of the Return of Indigenous Cultural Property Program', 'Extension of the Return of Indigenous Cultural Property Program', accessed 15 May 2020, www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/about-fahcsia/publication-articles/budget/07_indigenous_complete.pdf.

76 National Museum of Australia, 'Consultancy on the Long Term Storage or Disposal of Unprovenanced Indigenous Human Remains'.

77 Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation, *National Resting Place Consultation Report*, 4–5.

78 Quoted in Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation, *National Resting Place Consultation Report*, 5.

79 Department of Communication and the Arts, 'Australian Government Policy on Indigenous Repatriation'.

80 Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation, *National Resting Place Consultation Report*, 6 and 10.

long-term care and management of poorly provenanced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains; this was followed by a sector survey and wide consultation that culminated in the 2014 National Resting Place Consultation Report. This report marked a significant shift in the public discussion about the care of Ancestral Remains. In the preceding decades we observed the regular identification of the need for a keeping place, for greater coordination and for management of Ancestral Remains with limited provenance. By 2014 the character of a 'resting place', including what physical form it would take, where it would be located and how it would function, began to be mapped out. The language of 'resting place' was preferable to a 'keeping place' to better distinguish it from a museum and to reflect its role – the aspiration to 'move the current process for care and storage of ancestral remains away from the museum sector, and vesting the future long-term care of these ancestral remains to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'⁸¹ and for the National Resting Place to be a site for the care of Ancestral Remains provenanced only to 'Australia'.⁸² The report recommended a location within the Parliamentary Triangle as a 'beacon of consciousness' to remind all Australians of the past injustices involved in the collection and display of Ancestral Remains.⁸³

Amendments to the Australian Government Policy on Indigenous Repatriation in 2016 confirmed the government's commitment 'to addressing the injustice of Australia's shared past as it relates to the removal of ancestral remains and secret sacred objects to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to meet their cultural obligations and contribute to the wider Australian society'. The amended policy stated that the 'Australian Government seeks, on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the voluntary and unconditional return of their ancestral remains and associated notes and data' and expressed commitment to 'supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop the capacity to maintain their cultural rights, knowledge and practices'.⁸⁴ To enact the policy, the government committed funding to repatriation work and appointed an all-Indigenous advisory committee to advise on policy and program issues in relation to overseas and domestic Indigenous repatriation.⁸⁵

In this paper we have highlighted the work of Indigenous people in bringing about significant changes to museum practice and legislation. This influence has also extended to politicians and ambassadors who have played an important role in facilitating the repatriation of Ancestral Remains. In 2013, Parliamentary Secretary for the Arts Michael Danby helped facilitate the return of Ancestral Remains from

81 Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation, *National Resting Place Consultation Report*, 10.

82 Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation, *National Resting Place Consultation Report*, 12.

83 Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation, *National Resting Place Consultation Report*, 14.

84 Department of Communication and the Arts, 'Australian Government Policy on Indigenous Repatriation', 5–6.

85 Department of Communication and the Arts, 'Australian Government Policy on Indigenous Repatriation', 8.

the Charité Medical University in Berlin.⁸⁶ Former Australian ambassador to the United States Kim Beazley worked to promote the return of Ancestral Remains during his posting, writing to a number of American collecting institutions seeking information about their holdings of Ancestral Remains, as well as participating on panels discussing the importance of international repatriation efforts. He was personally involved in several repatriations and hosted two repatriation ceremonies at the Australian Embassy for remains repatriated from the Harvard Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology in 2012⁸⁷ and the Dunghutti repatriation.⁸⁸ In 2014, Prime Minister Tony Abbott and French president Emmanuel Macron issued a joint statement outlining their commitment to establishing a consultative process to facilitate the return of Ancestral Remains from French public institutions,⁸⁹ particularly significant as France has been a longstanding opponent to calls for repatriation. In the United Kingdom, Australian high commissioners Alexander Downer⁹⁰ and George Brandis⁹¹ have also supported repatriation efforts.

In the period 2018–19, the commitment for a National Resting Place gained high-level support from parliament. The 2018 Parliamentary Inquiry into Constitutional Recognition that considered the Uluru Statement from the Heart's call for 'Voice, Treaty and Truth' recommended establishing a National Resting Place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains in the nation's capital. The parliamentary inquiry viewed the National Resting Place as a vital part of truth-telling about our history and for healing and reconciliation as a 'place of commemoration, healing and reflection'.⁹² In April 2019, the report on the inquiry into Canberra's national institutions, *Telling Australia's Story – and Why It's Important* noted the lack of 'acknowledgement and demonstration of Australia's rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, language, heritage and culture'. The report recommended 'AIATSIS be expanded with a new home in the Parliamentary Zone and a broader role in representing the story of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' that

86 Timna Jacks, 'Danby Repatriates Remains', *Australian Jewish News*, 7 May 2013, accessed 16 June 2020, ajn.timesofisrael.com/danby-repatriates-remains/.

87 Commonwealth of Australia, 'International Repatriation Highlights', Office of the Arts, undated, accessed 16 June 2020, www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/cultural-heritage/indigenous-repatriation/international-repatriation/international-highlights.

88 George Brandis, 'Media Release: Traditional Custodians Bring Aboriginal Ancestral Remains Home from the US', 1 July 2015, accessed 16 June 2020, parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/3925384/upload_binary/3925384.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22media/pressrel/3925384%22/.

89 Australian Government, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 'Prime Minister's Joint Press Statement with the President of the French Republic', PM Transcripts, 19 November 2014, accessed 16 June 2020, pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-23987; we note that support from the French Ministry of Culture for repatriation of Ancestral Remains has not always upheld this stated intention.

90 SBS, 'Aboriginal Remains to Return from the UK', SBS News, updated 15 October 2016, accessed 16 June 2020, www.sbs.com.au/news/aboriginal-remains-to-return-from-uk.

91 Mitch Fifield, '37 Ancestral Remains Returned to Australia', Ministry for Communication and the Arts, 27 March 2019, accessed 16 June 2020, webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20191107181733/https://www.minister.communications.gov.au/minister/mitch-fifield/news/37-ancestral-remains-returned-australia.

92 Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition Relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, *Final Report*, xviii.

‘should include a national resting place for repatriated ancestral remains that cannot immediately return to country’;⁹³ the new institution was to be ‘developed under the leadership and comprehensive consultation with Indigenous Australians’.⁹⁴

Just a few months later, Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Minister for Indigenous Affairs Ken Wyatt announced their government’s support for ‘the establishment of a National Resting Place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander remains as a place of commemoration, healing and reflection’, and committed \$5 million to AIATSIS to undertake a scoping study and consultation. The prime minister characterised the National Resting Place as an ‘important memorial’ that ‘will recognise the unique contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and history to our nation’; he went on to say that the ‘Government’s commitment to a National Resting Place also supports the process of truth telling’.⁹⁵ The 2020–21 federal budget committed funding to develop a detailed business case as part of the government’s Indigenous Advancement Strategy for the establishment of the National Resting Place within a broader cultural precinct in Canberra.⁹⁶ In January 2022, the prime minister and minister for Indigenous Australians jointly announced that a new National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Precinct, Ngurra, would be established in Canberra. Wyatt commented: ‘At [Ngurra’s] heart will be a national resting place where the remains of Indigenous Australians taken from their country will be cared for until they are able to be returned to their communities’.⁹⁷

Conclusion

In this paper we have detailed the significant transformation that has occurred in relation to the collecting of Ancestral Remains. We have foregrounded the provocation and challenge Indigenous Australians have presented to collectors and, over the last 40 years, to collecting institutions and disciplinary knowledge. Refusing the category of object, Indigenous peoples have insisted on connection and responsibility to Ancestors. This dedicated labour has yielded significant change in policy and practice of collecting institutions and legislation. The combined work of museums and government alongside Indigenous peoples now comprehends Indigenous interest to care for and respect the dead, to restore dignity and spirit to Ancestral Remains. This can only be seen as a significant transformation and successful culmination of the work of Indigenous people here and across the globe. But more so, we have

93 Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, *Telling Australia’s Story*, ix.

94 Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, *Telling Australia’s Story*, xviii.

95 Liberal Party of Australia, ‘Support Indigenous Australians’, 15 May 2019, accessed 3 November 2021, parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/partypol/6725182/upload_binary/6725182.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22library/partypol/6725182%22.

96 Australian Government, ‘2021–22 Budget: Benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People across the Commonwealth’, 13 May 2021, accessed 3 November 2021, www.indigenous.gov.au/news-and-media/announcements/2021-22-budget-benefits-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people.

97 Australian Government, ‘Ngurra: The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Precinct’.

highlighted that the dignity of the dead and care for Ancestral Remains is also an assertion about the survival of their descendants. Indigenous people objected to, variously resisted and ultimately forged a reckoning with those institutions that hold their Ancestors, to bring them home.

In asserting their responsibility and connection to Ancestral Remains, the claims made by Aboriginal people and Aboriginal organisations in relation to repatriation have posed significant provocations to the history, role and purpose of collecting institutions. While some institutions have responded by recognising the opportunity provided by the return of Ancestral Remains to build new relationships with Indigenous communities, others have remained resistant, and significant practical challenges to repatriation remain. The National Resting Place, proposed to be established as a new Indigenous-led cultural institution, has a vital role to play in restoring dignity and providing ongoing care for those Ancestral Remains unable to be returned home, and in acknowledging the responsibility Indigenous people hold for their Ancestors.

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‘People come and go, but this place doesn’t’:¹ Narrating the creation of the Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place as cultural resurgence

Robert Hudson and Shannon Woodcock

Abstract: Koori Elders on Gunai Kurnai Country planned and fought for the creation of the Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place alongside their fight for self-determined medical and social services and land rights. We, the cultural manager of the Keeping Place, Kurnai Monero Ngarigo man Rob Hudson, and white colonist historian Shannon Woodcock, narrate in this paper how the community fought to create the Keeping Place through using the methodology that Elders gave to us in the Keeping Place itself. Rob’s telling of history from the time of European invasion until the opening of the Keeping Place in 1994 manifests the Keeping Place’s purpose, welcoming all Koori and non-Indigenous people into relationship with unceded Country and how we share it, in our scholarship as well as in everyday life.

The Koori community on Gunai Kurnai Country opened the Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place in Bairnsdale in 1994. We write this article to you from this place – 300 kilometres east of Wurundjeri Country, where the city of Melbourne is located. This paper shares how the founders of the Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place understood the history of European invasion and then narrates their work to create the Keeping Place within this colonial history. This article is grounded in the fact that Gunai Kurnai people are *of* this Country, and that this Country relies on Gunai Kurnai care for all relationships. Gunai Kurnai people constitute an ‘ecology

1 Quote by Uncle Russell Mullett, interview with the authors, 6 July 2020.

of intimacy' with other beings, including waters, animals and spirits in this place,² and remain sovereign through this recent and violent colonial occupation. This paper is also about Gunai Kurnai cultural resurgence, because this concept recognises the physical, cultural and spiritual role the Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place plays in Gunai Kurnai community and Country continuing to thrive. After an introductory overview of how we (Rob and Shannon) work together, the second part of the paper shares the Keeping Place's history of white invasion and Koori resistance. The third and final section narrates how Elders of the Koori community of Gunai Kurnai Country established the Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place.

This paper shares the story of how '67 proud, strong and resilient women and men' formed the East Gippsland Aboriginal Women's Group in 1972, which incorporated as East Gippsland Aboriginal Medical Services Co-operative Limited in 1975 and then the Gippsland & East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative Limited (GEGAC), as it is known today, in 1978.³ The community planned a Keeping Place for decades before it opened in 1994, discussing how it would be the cultural heart of their community run organisations. I (Rob) listened to my mother and aunties discuss the future contents and purpose of a Keeping Place around kitchen tables and campfires throughout my youth. The Keeping Place today is what they intended: a cultural space for Gunai Kurnai community education and a strategic interface with the colonial world, a place to bring our Ancestors and objects home to. I (Rob) have been the cultural manager here at the Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place since 2014, and Shannon has been learning in this place since 2017.

We tell the history of the Keeping Place's creation in this paper in the way the Keeping Place directs us to tell it; we follow the Elders' historical knowledge that structures the permanent exhibit, and we work in the space of the Keeping Place as it was designed for us to do. Rob is responsible for the narrative he shares here because of his role in work and community, and Shannon is responsible for writing up this narrative in the way required to communicate with Western historians. This paper does two things: it shares a history and also is an example of how the Keeping Place facilitates cultural resurgence. We tell you what happened, and in doing so we also demonstrate how the Keeping Place creates the conditions for ongoing cultural resurgence. We write this history directed by and grounded in community knowledge that lives in relationships between ourselves and radiates through the Koori community, and we write on Country, slowly, having waited for the right place and the right time: here, now.

2 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 8.

3 Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd (GEGAC), 'About Us', accessed 5 February 2023, www.gegac.org.au/about-us/.

Part one

Who are we and how are we writing this history together?

We are Rob Hudson and Shannon Woodcock. I (Rob) am a Kurnai Monero Ngarigo man and the cultural manager of the Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place. I was born in Bairnsdale and grew up travelling and working with my family and other families on Country. My family travelled up to Bega and back down here again with the bean-picking seasons. This was to make a living and be able to keep our families together. I am responsible for the Keeping Place; I work with community and teach non-Indigenous people who come here to learn. All the Ancestors are here; it's a very spiritual place. I culturally and physically look after the objects in storage, on display and when they are repatriated.

Shannon is a white colonist historian who moved to Gunai Kurnai Country in 2017. They are a specialist in racism and violence, and moved here to try to live in line with the fact that Gunai Kurnai people never ceded sovereignty. Along with other members of the Koori community, I (Rob) have directed Shannon's historical work since 2017. They don't do historical work or move through Country without direction, in their words, or without thinking about what they are doing here, in my (Rob's) words.

We first met in the community context of Clinton Pryor's walk through Bairnsdale and Lakes Entrance in NAIDOC week 2017,⁴ and we formally met at the Keeping Place a few weeks later. Since 2017, Shannon has joined many tours of the Keeping Place exhibition, we have recorded our discussions about the work and function of the Keeping Place, and we have worked out what we can research and write for the community together so that everyone might better understand this place. We have never spoken about our way of working as a particular academic methodology, but yarning initiated by Rob and facilitated by the Keeping Place is key to how our friendship and working relationship grew, and from this trust we have developed ways to collaborate on different kinds of research and writing activities.⁵

My (Rob) role at the Keeping Place includes directing Shannon's work, and the intent and purpose of the Keeping Place guides our collaboration and our methodologies in historical and community work. Our first formal project together was to gather all the archival sources about this Country as the State Library of Victoria's first

4 Clinton Pryor walked 5,800 km in 360 days from Perth to Canberra to meet with the prime minister and share a list of grievances from his community. For photos of Clinton Pryor when he was in Gunai Kurnai Country, see Clinton Pryor – The Spirit Walker @Clintonwalk, Twitter, accessed 5 February 2023, twitter.com/clintonwalk/status/882473895936143361.

5 We recognise many important aspects of yarning from our own everyday life, including the role of gender, in Bessarab and Ng'Andu, 'Yarning about Yarning as a Legitimate Method in Indigenous Research'. Atkinson, Baird and Adams' article 'Are You Really Using Yarning Research?' is important in highlighting the central role of relationality to yarning and thus to research.

regional fellows (2019–21). Our first co-authored book, entitled *Self-Determined First Nations Museums and Colonial Contestation: The Keeping Place* (2022), is about how I (Rob) work with people and with Ancestor objects in the Keeping Place, and the relationship of the local settler historical societies with the Keeping Place. This book is a genuinely co-authored work for museum studies and critical Indigenous studies specialists. It details the work that I (Rob) do at the Keeping Place, and the work I direct Shannon to do through the Keeping Place.

Presenting this knowledge to you here in printed English language is a poor substitute for a face-to-face conversation at the Keeping Place. If you were with us, we could have a yarn; I (Rob) could see how you listen, you could ask questions and our conversation would take its own direction. You not being here reminds us how academia is part of ongoing colonial occupation and exploitation. Sharing knowledge this way separates us into the people who give the information and invisible readers who take that information in ways that we hope will be responsible.

In colonial culture, white people write things down and then white historians take the written word as more truthful than what is verbally shared. Historians have often written about Koori people without asking us if the white sources they are reading tell the truth, and they fail to interrogate written settler sources by themselves, especially failing to pay attention to violent occupation as intentional. When colonisers take information about our families and Country without relationships with the people or place, their work is often based on the incorrect idea that Koori communities don't know our own history. This causes pain, because nothing could be further from the truth; Koori communities know Koori and settler history through a sharing of knowledge that is in all our relationships with each other and with place. Colonial academic culture takes writing itself as a sign of superior knowledge and often fails to consult with Indigenous knowledge holders. This has created many historical accounts that are incomplete and obscured by perpetrator solidarity and bias.

Koori community knowledge of Koori history is strong, and we both believe (from our respective positions as knowledge holder and as Western academic) that Koori ways of knowing are more trustworthy than history written about Koori people by people outside the community. This is because Koori people engage with historical knowledge of themselves through their relationships with and responsibilities to this knowledge. As Yamatji historian Crystal McKinnon writes:

many Indigenous people consciously occupy a space of accountability to their families and wider communities. Comprehending this relatedness and accountability is important to understanding and utilizing Indigenous research methodologies, and Indigenous knowledges themselves.⁶

⁶ McKinnon, 'Sitting and Listening', 495.

When incorrect information is produced in communal sharing, other people listen, correct or add to the existing knowledge.⁷ On the level of things that are events locatable in settler time,⁸ this brief history of the Keeping Place addresses multiple omissions in Gippsland's history, putting the strong knowledge of the Elders who made the Keeping Place on the English academic record. We also want to put the white settler community's use of physical violence in 1987 against the Koori community back on the white colonial historical record.

The Koori community on Gunai Kurnai Country conceived of the Keeping Place as a vital centre for Indigenous cultural resurgence. They didn't use these words, but we choose an Indigenous resurgence paradigm because, as Jeff Corntassel explains, this 'reframes decolonization by turning away from the state in order to focus more fully on the complex interrelationships between Indigenous nationhood, place-based relationships, and community-centred practices that reinvigorate everyday acts of renewal and regeneration'.⁹ This describes what the Elders were doing when they were 'discussing' or 'curating' the future Keeping Place in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar and activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson says 'resurgence must be concerned with the reattachment of our minds, bodies and spirits to the network of relationships and ethical practices that generates grounded normativity'.¹⁰ First Nations communities across so-called Australia have enacted cultural resurgence throughout the period of colonial occupation, in organised and informal ways. We use the term 'cultural resurgence' to reference and share with other First Nations scholars here how we theorise this academic intervention in 2022. We pay our respects to the many artistic, cultural, political and protest movements before and alongside that of the Koori community on Gunai Kurnai Country who described themselves in different ways in English while working for self-determination and sovereign community. Especially between the 1960s and the 1990s, First Nations communities across the continent fought as the Gunai Kurnai Country community did to set up self-determined medical and housing services as well as cultural centres.¹¹

Rob takes responsibility for aligning this work with the intentions of Elders for this Keeping Place, and for the community knowledge shared here being appropriate to the relationship we have with you, reader. Not all information is shareable, and knowledge cannot be safely shared without tending to relationships. Participants in the sharing of knowledge understand their reciprocal responsibilities through relating

7 This teaching as cited and articulated here belongs to Uncle Brian McKinnon, from his forthcoming PhD dissertation. Shannon thanks Uncle Brian for working to explain this and waiting for them to come to understand it.

8 Here we use Mark Rifkin's concept of settler time, 'an account of time already oriented around settlement'. Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 9.

9 Corntassel, 'Life beyond the State', 73.

10 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 44.

11 The Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place was one of multiple Keeping Places established at the same time as self-determined community organisations across the continent. For richer contextualisation of the history of Keeping Places, see Pieris, *Indigenous Cultural Centers and Museums*; Faulkhead and Berg, *Power and the Passion*; Museums and Galleries NSW, *Keeping Places & Beyond*; National Gallery of Australia, *Keeping Culture*; Robins, *Paradox and Paradigms*. For insight into the continuity of cultural practice in the south-east, see Jones, 'Lighting the Fire'.

and relationships. As we have not been able to consult with all the families of all the people who were involved in the events detailed in this article, we do not include any photographs of or information about people already published in the colonial press.

My (Rob) knowledge as cultural manager of the Keeping Place comes through my family, who taught and teach me how to relate to community and Country. Just as Simpson explains in relation to Nishnaabeg society, in Gunai Kurnai culture, people were and are:

expected to figure out their gifts and their responsibilities through ceremony and reflection and self-actualisation, and that process was really the most important governing process on an individual level – more important than the gender you were born into.¹²

This is how Gunai Kurnai society still functions; people know their families, their talents, and their roles in relationships with other people and places. My role in the Keeping Place is to keep our Ancestors, Ancestor objects and knowledge safe, and to support Koori community members in their cultural journeys.

Our collaboration is ongoing, unattached to any 'projects' and unfinanced, and this work is part of Rob's job at the Keeping Place. Shannon does their part of the work without payment, because the knowledge and experience gained from working for community results in more opportunities for Shannon to find paid work. To write this article, built on a careful and solid working relationship, Rob wrote the history given by the Elders that led to the creation of the Keeping Place (part two), and we shared writing the history of the Elders' fight to get the physical Keeping Place established in the third part. We worked out the content of part two together, putting the archival evidence together with Rob's knowledge of what happened, and Shannon then wrote it up with references and white historical sources included. Rob reads the written drafts, we discuss them at length and Rob has the final call.

Rob speaks directly in part two, and Rob's voice and identification of the subject as 'our' community continues in part three. This reflects Rob's knowledge and focus as the provider of the content and structure of the article, and creates a space of cultural resurgence through our use of an Indigenous standpoint research position. The use of 'we' and 'our' for the Koori community is the authors' rhetorical choice to communicate that Rob is the primary author and the Koori community the primary actors, the written equivalent of Shannon sitting quietly in the room while community hold the floor. Shannon could not and would not be writing any of this without Rob's direction, content and knowledge. Rob could not and would not be writing this history for an academic journal without Shannon's academic knowledge and ease with writing, but this technical skill is secondary to the factual and conceptual content. We wrote this paper in Rob's office at the Keeping Place, and Uncle Russell Mullett participated in multiple recorded discussions, for which he is cited throughout. Ruth Walker also participated in very many of the tours, yarns and discussions that led to this article.

12 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 4.

In the next section, Rob's use of the Elders' structure to provide an overview of the European occupation of Gunai Kurnai Country since 1839 highlights how the Keeping Place itself structures this history of the Keeping Place. The third part of the paper draws on primary sources and knowledge from Rob and Uncle Russell to place the fight for the Keeping Place within the dynamic changes in the Koori community from the 1950s until the 1990s.

Part two

Europeans invade and occupy Gunai Kurnai Country 1839–1957

We belong to one another, all part of the Gunai Kurnai Nation.¹³

Gunai and Kurnai people come from Borun and Tuk, who come from this Country. Borun and Tuk are our Ancestors, and many of the other stories we have that teach us how to be in Country and in relationship with each other are stories from a time when there was no need to divide animals from humans. In our stories there isn't a sense that words and spoken language are a superior way of communicating compared to so many other actions, either.¹⁴ The Gunai Kurnai are a nation comprised of the Brataualung, Brayakaulung, Brabralung, Krauatungalung and Tatungalung family clans, and our Country is our language area, from Wilsons Promontory in the west to the town of Orbost in the east and to just below Mount Hotham and Omeo in the mountains to the north.

Europeans violently invaded this Country to take the land. They used animals (sheep, cows) to occupy the land, change it and profit from it. The Keeping Place exhibition calls the first decade of European invasion the decade of death, because the white colonists worked together to massacre men, women and children just for being Gunai Kurnai people. Colonists shot as many of the animals that were already here as they could because they wanted all grass to be for their stock. White settlers abducted our children and perpetrated sexual violence against women. This all continues today, and it began from the first years that they arrived here.

Gunai Kurnai people fought back in many ways. They physically fought, rescuing women that white men like Ronald Macalister (1843, Port Albert) held captive and hurt. When the white men formed the first police forces specifically to remove us from our land, we learnt how to watch them and organised raids to demand the release of

13 These words, written by the Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place founders, are at the start of the permanent exhibition.

14 Tuk and Yang, 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor', 6.

our brothers and fathers held in the cells at Eagle Point and Maffra.¹⁵ We hid to save our lives, negotiated with diplomacy and used military strategy. Angus McMillan, and many other white men, kidnapped our young boys to use as translators and as free labour.

In my tours at the Keeping Place, I can only speak about my own family and what I know is true. Here, just as when you visit the exhibition, you will understand what I say in your own way. As Phillip Pepper says right at the start of his history book *The Kurnai of Gippsland*, (white) historians have written a lot about what happened here, but they have misrepresented the parts about how European people behaved towards Country and towards Aboriginal people.¹⁶ To use the exhibition's way of sharing the past does not make the information limited or out of date.¹⁷ The opposite is true. Our Elders spent a long time making sure that everyone was represented here and discussing how to present the truth, so significantly changing the structure and content of the exhibition would weaken its purpose.

My Elders learnt what happened in the same way they taught it to me. I was shown places on Country and learnt how to relate to those places through what has happened there, and what still happens there. This article provides the most basic overview. Sharing knowledge in this way, in community and on Country, means that 'history' as I tell you here is used in our everyday life, it isn't separate to how we live. We know that the colonists wrote down only a small part of what they did to our people and Country, and a smaller part again is in the archives.¹⁸ We know our history because our families experienced it. We have shared scientific, cultural and legal knowledge for more than 60,000 years, and we also share knowledge about colonisation.

By 1861, many more white people arrived and divided the land. The government let Rev. Bulmer establish the Lake Tyers mission. In 1863, Moravian missionary Rev. Hagenhauer established an Aboriginal mission called Ramahyuck.¹⁹ The missionaries wanted to protect Aboriginal people from white people, but they destroyed Aboriginal people in the same instance, because once you keep people locked up in one place and forbid them their culture that's what you're doing. On the missions you weren't allowed to do anything cultural, you had to learn Christianity instead of what the Elders did. That's how they took away our culture. Academics (like Howitt) and museums made their collections by taking our belongings and knowledge by force. Academics and museums also took animals, rocks and photographs from Country

15 The Border Police were the first colonial police force, who squatters called to Gippsland to help them remove Gunai Kurnai people from the land. Pepper, *The Kurnai of Gippsland*, 64–76.

16 Pepper, *The Kurnai of Gippsland*, xii.

17 'The desire for a "new beginning" is a common imperial tool that enables the institutionalization of totalitarian elements presented as constitutive of democratic regimes.' Azoulay, *Potential History*, 306.

18 Indeed, 'The role of institutions such as archives and museums in the "preservation" of the past is the effect of a vast enterprise of destruction conducted at the expense of and as a substitute for destroyed worlds.' And 'If what they preserve is extracted from living worlds, and if living worlds are producing objects whose destination is the museum and archive, their study cannot be confined to what is in them but should include the role they play in this enterprise of world destruction.' Azoulay, *Potential History*, 19–20.

19 McLisky, Russell and Boucher, 'Managing Mission Life'.

without permission. They treated our Ancestors' bodies, our living bodies, and spears and shields and bullroarers as if they were objects, as if they weren't important for our health and relationships with Country. We are still fighting to find everything in their warehouses and collections, and to get special items such as Tulaba's shield (now held by the National Museum of Australia) and the bullroarers (in Pitt Rivers Museum) returned.²⁰ We need these objects to continue important ceremonies and to understand our own culture better; the bullroarers, for example, 'dispel the myth of initiation ceremonies only being for men'.²¹

The missionaries wouldn't let us speak our language. It does shatter you, the way that white policy didn't allow us to do all the things that come around with our law. Thousands of years of our knowledge was in our language and ceremony, and that was taken. If you were speaking language, you were punished and taken away from your family. If you didn't learn language, you could still be taken away. That was in the mission times, for my mother and in the time that I was a kid as well, in the 1970s. It was a catch-22; whether you teach culture or you don't, either way your family was going to be smashed if they caught you.

Those missionaries and teachers on Lake Tyers mission bought up our land and made guest houses, then brought tourists to the mission. Then the mission managers let us revive our culture of weaving and boomerang making to sell them to tourists and bring money in for the mission. They stopped us really practising our culture, but money talks. If it wasn't for missions, Aboriginal people would've been wiped out, but they did a lot of damage as well, and still do today. A lot of our Elders speak about getting rations to survive.

The photos of people living in myah myahs²² up on the wall in the Keeping Place, that's what I grew up in too. When I was a little tacker growing up, moving up and down the coast, up to about 1985, when I was about 10 years old, we lived in the bark huts on the riverbanks. Our floor was very polished dirt. There were probably 100 of us travelling, and a lot of us kids were hidden at different times because the policy was to take kids from families. My mum is Black. My dad is white. And at that time, in the 1970s, they were still taking children. You know about the Stolen Generations?

In 1886, the government made the orders to remove some people from the missions with the 'Half Caste Act'.²³ They were forced away from their families. A lot of the Elders today still speak about that. A lot of them don't speak either, because they don't want to go back into the pain of the past. Our people weren't allowed to work or have homes or medical treatment or education like white people were – and this was right up until the 1970s! The people forced off the missions couldn't see their families

20 For the Pitt Rivers Museum's restitution processes, see Hicks, *The Brutish Museums*. For the importance of the bullroarer, see Gibson and Mullett, 'The Last Jeraeil of Gippsland'.

21 Uncle Russell Mullett, interview with the authors, 6 July 2020. Also see Hudson and Woodcock, *Self-Determined First Nations Museums*, 58 and 68.

22 This is my (Rob's) spelling to reflect the way I was raised to say myah myah.

23 *Aborigines Protection Act 1886* (Vic.).

unless they snuck in at night, and people inside the mission couldn't leave, or work, or see a doctor or see their own children who had been taken away without written permission from the Aborigines Protection Board.

In the Aboriginal community everyone knows about this. It's really hard for me to know what to tell you about it because we were brought up knowing this. It's part of our family stories of who we are. These are the life stories of people I work with, our families, and people who come into the Keeping Place. White people too have come in here with stories of their families adopting Aboriginal kids who were stolen, and they realise now and share that pain with their families, and also the people they work with, their work families. This pain is through both of our communities.²⁴

Part three

Our fight for self-determination 1957–94

In the 1950s, state and federal government policies questioned whether they could continue to control Aboriginal people on missions in the same way, because we clearly weren't going to disappear as they expected. Their assimilation policies were about stopping us living together on the outskirts of towns or on the mission, they wanted to separate and control our families by moving us into housing in different places.²⁵ This was also a time when the government removed black children to raise them in white homes and they policed the people living on Lake Tyers as well.²⁶ We all knew where everyone was, and we lived in multigenerational families and were very familiar with the government controlling our lives, so the adults began to organise. As Chicka Dixon from Wallaga Lake said, 'this was genocide, but white people called it assimilation'.²⁷

In 1955 the premier instructed Charles McLean to review the *Aborigines Act 1928*, which still gave the Board for the Protection of Aborigines control over us. McLean visited communities across Victoria and depicted our way of living as a problem. It was a problem that we were poor, but he saw it as reflecting our culture rather than how society forced us to live. McLean visited Lake Tyers mission, and historian Corinne Manning points out that even though Lake Tyers residents had complained about the awful conditions they were forced to live under there since the 1940s, McLean saw it as simply more profitable for the government to sell the land and move the people elsewhere.²⁸ In 1956, Laurie Moffatt, who lived at Lake Tyers, told the press that

24 For a longer tour of the Keeping Place, see Hudson and Woodcock, *Self-Determined First Nations Museums*, 27–44. To be clear, this telling of the history through the exhibition links with the narrative in part three through detailing the affective and embodied work of the Elders alongside their ways of remembering and what they choose to remind us of as our shared past.

25 Healy, 'Aboriginal Mobility'.

26 Laurie Moffatt, 'Lake Tyers', September 1961, MS MC 8, DR 5, State Library of Victoria.

27 Tatz, *Black Viewpoints*, 45.

28 Manning, 'The McLean Report', 171.

residents wanted to live on and manage the reserve themselves including farming the land.²⁹ Despite the requests of Koori people at Lake Tyers, McLean recommended closing and selling Lake Tyers Reserve.³⁰ McLean's report resulted in the *Aborigines Act 1957* and replaced the Board for the Protection of Aborigines with the Aborigines Welfare Board, which ran Aboriginal affairs until 1967.

Koori communities organised and protested from 1957 onwards, working with white people who supported Aboriginal self-determination at the Council for Aboriginal Rights, and drawing on strategies of public protest.³¹ As with today, we fought on many fronts: to save Lake Tyers mission, to support the campaign for the referendum, and to demand self-determined housing, medical, educational and cultural organisations. Gunai Kurnai people, and Koori people who grew up on and lived on Gunai Kurnai Country, focused on the fight here, but we were always learning from and travelling to support battles being fought by other communities, especially the Koori movements in Melbourne and Sydney.

In 1957, Doug Nicholls, Doris Blackburn, Stan Davey and Gordon Bryant formed the Aborigines Advancement League (AAL),³² and in 1958 Nicholls was the Victorian representative to the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (FCAA). FCAA, made up of white people and First Nations people, decided to push for a national referendum to amend the Australian Constitution. This would enable the federal government to legislate for Aboriginal people as a group rather than leaving 'Aboriginal affairs' to the state governments. Between 1963 and 1970, FCAATSI (Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders from 1964) held annual conferences in Canberra, and campaigned for equal wages, for what became the 1967 referendum to change the Australian Constitution, and for land rights. Hundreds of grassroots organisers attended these conferences, and people shared information and knowledge about each other's problems and solutions.

Pastor Doug Nicholls and Gladys Nicholls visited rural and urban communities. Uncle Russell Mullett remembers them visiting his community at Jackson's Track. After the government said it would close Lake Tyers (in 1962), Doug Nicholls marched with representatives from Lake Tyers in Melbourne in 1963. He was vital to that campaign because he brought together Koori people and non-Indigenous people who fought with us from all over Victoria. He understood how the fights for land rights and health care and our rights were linked. In 1965, the Victorian Aborigines Welfare Board decided to lease land in Morwell and force Aboriginal people living at Lake Tyers to move to a 'transit village' there.³³ Doug Nicholls and the Aborigines

29 *Melbourne Sun* in Rowse, 'Contesting Assimilation', x.

30 McLean, 'Report upon the Operation of the Aborigines Act 1928 and the Regulations and Orders Made Thereunder'.

31 Taffe, 'Fighting for Lake Tyers'.

32 Broome, *Fighting Hard*.

33 Marsden, "'What's This about a New Mission?'" , 95.

Advancement League fought against this as a ‘continuation of the Government’s policy of arbitrarily acquiring land and placing Aboriginal families there in areas which are alien to them’.³⁴

After a lot of campaigning and discussions, in May 1965 Lake Tyers became a ‘Permanent Reserve’³⁵ and in 1971, under the *Aboriginal Land Act 1970*, the government gave unconditional title deeds to families residing on Lake Tyers Reserve.³⁶ Charlie Carter became the first chairman of Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust, and he gave a powerful speech when he accepted the deeds (Figure 1). He said, ‘this land is our land, our land for Aboriginals’, which is the truth.³⁷



Figure 1: Charlie Carter standing at a podium and accepting the deeds to Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust in 1971. Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls is seated behind Charlie Carter in the far left of the frame.

Source: Audio Visual Archive, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra. Online at National Museum Australia, indigenoustrights.net.au/land_rights/lake_tyers,_1962-70.

³⁴ Marsden, “‘What’s This about a New Mission?’”, 95.

³⁵ Anonymous 1985, 69–85, cited in Rowse, ‘Contesting Assimilation’; Broome, *Fighting Hard*, 99–107. Rowse, *Indigenous and Other Australians*, 325–28.

³⁶ See Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, *Annual Report*, 1971, 3.

³⁷ Charlie Carter, at 2:30 in video clip entitled ‘A Brief History of the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Community’, uploaded to www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1658871070899933, produced by ABC, www.abc.net.au/missionvoices/lake_tyers, site discontinued. Throughout this period, white people wrote letters to the press about whether they supported Aboriginal people being given [back their] land. Many colonists were against land being handed back because they didn’t want Aboriginal people to have the right to sell the land if they decided to. For one example, see the editorial ‘A Calculated Gamble’, *Age* (Melbourne), 26 July 1971.

A lot happened between 1965 and 1971 when the deeds were handed back. People saw the news footage from the 1965 Freedom Rides, and talked about protest methods for civil rights, especially in rural communities, at the FCAATSI conference. Racism in everyday life on occupied Gunai Kurnai Country was relentless and violent. Racist violence was also gendered, and Koori men faced particular violence in their everyday lives while trying to earn a living. Uncle Russell Mullett told us that:

the movement was about women and welfare support. Not only here, it was all over the state. That's another untold history. If you look at the history of co-ops and the women who formed them. Those women knew about the law because they kicked around, I guess. It's like Pastor Doug Nicholls, his wife Gladys Nicholls was really strong, and you had these strong women moving around the place talking. Even on a national level, women like Faith Bandler were strong women around all through the 1960s period leading up to the referendum. Look at how many women were involved in that! At the end of the day, women put in the time and had the impetus to do it whereas the men in the community had almost like a learned helplessness. For those that were living in the bush, even in our place down there at Jackson's Track, the men went there because they could work in the bush, away from the government.³⁸

In 1968, after the referendum, a new federal Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs replaced the Aborigines Welfare Board, and then the Victorian Office of the newly established Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs was opened. Activism for Lake Tyers continued, with ongoing and increasing visits from allied groups of students and workers on building projects, 'adventure camps' and training in first aid, as just some examples gathered from news reports. The Black Panther Party also had connections in the Gunai Kurnai community and on Lake Tyers, and Roosevelt Brown visited in 1971.³⁹ As Paul Coe said in 1974:

the whole policy of Black Power in Australia is a policy of self-assertion, of self-identity ... which is trying to encourage black culture – the re-learning, the re-instating of black culture wherever it is possible.⁴⁰

A fight for health and housing

In 1972, 20 Aunties formed an organisation called the East Gippsland Aboriginal Women's Group and marched from Lake Tyers to Bairnsdale to draw attention to the complete lack of health services for Aboriginal people on our Country.⁴¹ We couldn't get basic health services. Some of those women, like Nessie Skuta and Linda Twite, had experience with Aboriginal politics, but all of them knew how hard it was to

38 Uncle Russell Mullett, interview, 6 July 2020.

39 'Black Panther "at Lake Tyers"', *Sun News-Pictorial*, 13 January 1972.

40 Tatz, *Black Viewpoints*, 104.

41 'The Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs records that in the prior year, in Victoria, 'at least three new Aboriginal groups have emerged', *Annual Report*, 1971, 2.

get medical help for our people. The first medical centre was in a small building on Frances Street in Bairnsdale. The women rented other buildings throughout Bairnsdale for housing and services.

In 1975, the Women's Group incorporated as East Gippsland Aboriginal Medical Services Co-operative Limited, which became Gippsland & East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative Limited (GEGAC) in 1978. The federal *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976* was useful for the community to form GEGAC.⁴² Communities across urban and regional locations formed self-determined medical centres, legal services, housing services and cultural centres at this time. As Johanna Perheentupa details in her book *Redfern: Aboriginal Activism in the 1970s*, community organisation of health, legal and social welfare services was grounded in specific places and communities, such as in the urban centres of Redfern and Fitzroy, and communities influenced each other by sharing experience and knowledge.⁴³ GEGAC writes on their website that they:

would not exist if not for the founding members who showed courage and leadership to stand up and act for all Aboriginal people in Gippsland and East Gippsland. Fighting for equality, recognition and respect to improve the quality of life for all Aboriginal people.⁴⁴

Cultural heritage as community wellbeing

Alongside the creation of self-determined organisations, there was a strong Koori movement for community control of stolen Ancestors, Ancestor objects and cultural heritage. From invasion, colonists stole the bodies of Ancestors and sacred objects, and these items still constitute major collections at the University of Melbourne, Victoria Museum and National Gallery of Victoria.⁴⁵ White people used stolen artefacts and bodies of First Nations people to discursively construct First Nations people on this continent as 'the "ground zero" of evolutionary development'.⁴⁶ Smith emphasises that the changes to heritage control after 1980 in Victoria were influenced by the civil rights and land rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and that Koori people called:

the ethics of the collection practices of museums and archaeologists ... into question. Land was re-defined in public discourse as both material and cultural by these claims, as were the Aboriginal 'artefacts' held in museums and by university-based archaeologists.⁴⁷

42 Uncle Russell Mullett, interview, 6 July 2020.

43 Perheentupa, *Redfern*.

44 GEGAC, 'About Us'.

45 See Azoulay, *Potential History*; Hicks, *The Brutish Museums*.

46 Turnbull, 'Australian Museums'; Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*.

47 Smith, 'A History of Aboriginal Heritage Legislation', 110.

Uncle Russell Mullett told us about his work as an inspector for the *Archaeological and Aboriginal Relics Preservation Act 1972* in the 1980s. Along with other heritage workers such as Jim Berg in Melbourne, who founded the Koori Heritage Trust in 1985, Uncle Russell confronted and inspected the work and collections of white archaeologists from universities who continued to take students for 'digs' on Ancestor burial sites without the required permits.⁴⁸ Uncle Russell's presence as an inspector prevented their digs, and inspectors were also called by private collectors to register what they held with the Victoria Archaeological Survey, as per the legislation. Koori inspectors developed knowledge and relationships vital for the future repatriation of stolen objects to Keeping Places on many Countries, and Uncle Russell, now at GLaWAC, works closely with the Keeping Place.⁴⁹ In the early years of the Keeping Place, the Gunai Kurnai community welcomed home a canoe made in 1900, which had been kept in a shed, and shields and carvings that were held in the Victoria Museum.

These items needed a Keeping Place to hold them in their relationship with Country. The cultural manager is always someone who is part of this community, and who has knowledge responsibilities. A Keeping Place is the primary safe place to return an object to because the required community members for that particular object are brought together to welcome it home. Speaking from our own experiences, myself (Rob) and Uncle Russell let the objects guide us, tell us how they need to be treated.⁵⁰ We contact the families connected with these objects or Ancestors, and we find the correct place for the returned item, be that returning it to Country, or to the family or keeping it here at the Keeping Place.

The fight for land rights and cultural heritage are only separate things in colonial ways of thinking and law. It is all part of the same fight if you want protect land from destruction, to protect people and animals from dispossession and to protect cultural heritage. When community stood up and said this, colonial laws had to change across many areas. When Aunt Sandra Onus and Aunt Christine Frankland/Saunders won *Onus v. Alcoa of Australia Ltd* in 1981, for example,⁵¹ the Federal Court recognised that Gunditjmara people had a 'special interest' with Country, and that white archaeologists were not competent to do a scientific assessment of the site.⁵² Koori demands led to two landmark pieces of federal legislation, the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984* and *Aboriginal Land (Lake Condah and Framlingham Forest) Act 1987*.⁵³ Aunt Sandra Onus and Marjorie Thorpe led

48 See Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, 'Historical Overview', reviewed 16 March 2020, accessed 5 February 2023, www.aboriginalheritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/historical-overview; Faulkhead and Berg, *Power and the Passion*.

49 Hudson and Woodcock, *Self-Determined First Nations Museums* details the extent of cultural, spiritual and technical work required at the Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place in the process of repatriation.

50 See Chapter 3 'Receiving and Working with Ancestor Objects' in Hudson and Woodcock, *Self-Determined First Nations Museums*, 65–84.

51 Weir, *The Gunditjmara Land Justice Story*.

52 Smith, 'A History of Aboriginal Heritage Legislation', 113.

53 Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation website, accessed 5 February 2023, www.gunditjmirring.com/cultural-heritage.

the fight for Djab Wurrung Country trees (2018–22), 40 years after *Onus v. Alcoa*. This highlights the ongoing colonial refusal to protect vital cultural heritage, and the incredible energy and fight required from Elders.

The right place for the Keeping Place

In 1983, the Department of Education put the old Bairnsdale High School block up for sale. This place is high, overlooking the wetlands and lakes from the southern edge of the town of Bairnsdale. This was a meeting place for Gunai Kurnai people long before invasion. The block included the old school buildings and, most importantly, the outdoor open area bordered by large eucalyptus trees, including one that had made a canoe with community and grown that memory in its bark. Because of the significance of this site to the Koori community, GEGAC negotiated with the Department of Education from 1983 until 1987 to buy the land, but the department refused to sell GEGAC the entire block.

There was a huge ceremony on the land in February 1987 when GEGAC bought the section of the block that the government would allow them to purchase. The *Bairnsdale Advertiser* printed a photo of ‘Mrs Rachael Mullett, Chairman of GEGAC and Mrs Nessie Skuta OAM former member of the National Aboriginal Conference’ holding the deed.⁵⁴ The audience of at least 100 people sat in rows of plastic chairs. GEGAC had published detailed information about what the planned co-op centre would provide in the *Bairnsdale Advertiser* the week before.⁵⁵ The article explained that the new ‘Aboriginal Centre’ would include social services, a dining room and drop-in centre, administration, health services, a hall for the National Aboriginal Conference and would ‘take into account foreseeable expansion, as required to meet increases in social, educational and cultural programs’. Further, the article detailed:

the Keeping Place will form the basis of the exhibition areas. The co-op intends to reassemble artifacts here which are now located in other museums and or privately owned. In time the material to be displayed, together with the cultural knowledge of the community and archival information to be collected in the library will develop into a detailed account of regional aboriginal history and culture. A workshop/laboratory (for the maintenance of the artifact collection) and artifacts shop will adjoin the Keeping Place Library resource centre to compliment those items on display in the Keeping Place proper. Materials to be collected will include any relevant literature relating to local aboriginal culture, family histories, mission and archive reports, newspapers, government reports and historic photographs. It would also collect oral history as available. Craft workshops – the workshops will again fulfil an educational role, while also generating income for the co-op through the manufacture of trad aboriginal

⁵⁴ *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, 20 February 1987, 1.

⁵⁵ *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, 13 February 1987, 1, 8.

artifacts. Craftsmen with the skill and knowledge necessary for manufacturing aboriginal artifacts still live in the area and will be engaged to train others in traditional manufacturing techniques. Thus at least some section of local aboriginal culture would be ensured of continuing and not be lost forever. Artifacts to be produced will include weapons, tools, paintings and carvings. Groups of school children and other visitors will also be encouraged to inspect the artifacts being made.⁵⁶

White residents of Bairnsdale, especially those in Rupert Street bordering the site, protested against GEGAC's building plan at public meetings and in letters to the council and the *Bairnsdale Advertiser*. These colonists argued that proximity to GEGAC would lower their property values and negatively impact their street parking. GEGAC organised an open forum where people could see the architectural plans and ask questions. Local residents were familiar with the beautiful old scar tree on the Rupert Street side of the block, and it was common knowledge that those trees were old Gunai Kurnai meeting places. The plans were shared with the public on Monday 24 March 1987, and on Thursday night 27 March 1987 someone came and burnt down those trees. Someone doused the trees in petrol, watched them burn and no-one called the fire brigade.

The community, through GEGAC, published a powerful letter in response to the attack in the local newspaper. The Elders called the burning of the scar tree a:

contemptible action and one which was not only a direct and vicious attack on Aboriginal people, but one of destruction of historical heritage ... It is a naïve notion that the removal of the tree would remove the significance Aborigines attach to the land it stood on. An action based upon such a notion, however, is quite in keeping with the way in which Aborigines have been treated in the past by the wider community. Destruction of the tree does not remove its significance. The charred remains of the tree will serve as a monument to the continued struggle of Aborigines towards self-determination. This action only makes the Aboriginal people more determined to achieve their ideals. The proposed Cultural Centre to be built on the site will be of benefit to the whole community. It will not only serve as a cultural focus for Aborigines but will also symbolise the invitation of friendship and acceptance that Aborigines extend to others. It is deplorable that those who must have seen destruction occurring on this site did not come forward to save the tree that was being destroyed.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, 13 February 1987, 8.

⁵⁷ *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, 30 March 1987, 3.

THE BAIRNSDALE ADVERTISER

Canoe tree destroyed by fire

Police at Bairnsdale are making investigations following a fire early on Friday morning, which destroyed a canoe tree on the site of the proposed Aboriginal Community Cultural and Recreational Centre.

The tree had been burning for some time before the fire was reported, and it has been destroyed, with only the stump remaining in the ground, and the rest of the tree lying where it fell.

It had been intended that the tree would be preserved in the development of the site, latest plans for the project having been presented to Bairnsdale Town Council on Monday night last.

STATEMENT BY CO-OPERATIVE.
On Friday afternoon, the board of directors of the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal

Co-Operative Limited issued a statement condemning the "senseless destruction" of the tree, which they said was registered as a relic about 25 years ago.

They said the burning of the tree was a "contemptible action and one which was not only an action which was a direct and vicious attack upon aboriginal people, but one of destruction of historical heritage."

The statement continued:

"The aboriginal community of Bairnsdale has recently been met with protest, against the proposed construction of a Cultural Centre, by a small group of local residents and a prominent local politician."

"The high profile and emotional media coverage of this issue has certainly contributed towards this act of destruction."

"The aboriginal community has continued to adopt a passive responsible and productive attitude towards negotiations with the protesters and if the protest had not been so public, the tree would be still there."

"It is a naive notion that the removal of the tree would remove the significance aborigines attach to the land it stood on."

"An action based upon such a notion however, is quite in keeping with the way in which aborigines

have been treated, in the past, by the wider community."

"Destruction of the tree does not remove its significance."

"The charred remains of the tree will serve as a monument to the continued struggle of aborigines towards self-determination."

"This action only makes the aboriginal people more determined to achieve their ideals."

"The proposed Cultural Centre to be built on the site will be of benefit to the whole community."

"It will not only serve as a cultural focus for aborigines, but will also symbolise the invitation of friendship and acceptance that aborigines extend to others."

"It is deplorable that those who must have seen destruction occurring on this site did not come forward to save the tree that was being destroyed."

"The tree carried the same, if not more significance to aborigines as, for example, historic buildings do for many in the wider community. It served as a part of the memory of ancestors and of their achievements and life-style."

"The Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative is seeking advice from the Crown Solicitor as to

what further action is to be taken.

COMMENT BY MINISTER

The Victorian Minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs Mr Jim Kennan said on Friday "I am angered and saddened by the news that the tree has been destroyed."

"I am sure that the overwhelming percentage of the Bairnsdale community will be disgusted by this senseless act of destruction."

"I am sure that, together with the Bairnsdale Council, most residents will want to ensure that the Bairnsdale aboriginal community's plans to develop the former High School site for the benefit of the whole community will not be jeopardised by this act of vandalism."

CORRESPONDENCE

Problems at Paynesville

Sir, — It was lovely to see Paynesville get a bit of a clean up in places that will be in view during the Governor's visit.

A shame though, that the Governor won't want to swim inside the yellow markers, where rocks are 18 inches high covered by weed. Then along in the children's sand pit, there are mounds of gravel just where they were emptied some time ago, covered in grass.

If anyone is going to take their grandchildren or children to play there, I suggest they leave the plastic bucket and spade home and take a pick and crowbar, as for sure that's what they will need.

This is a lovely tourist area but not if you have small children.

A. Stanton,
Main Road,
Paynesville.

Wy Yung site to be sold

Sir, — The residents of Bairnsdale, and more especially those residing in the Wy Yung - Ellaswood area, may be interested to know that since 1984 the Wy Yung Community Hall Committee has been en-



Remains of the canoe tree on the former Bairnsdale High School site, after it was destroyed by fire early on Friday morning (see story).

Figure 2: Image of the canoe tree destroyed by arson in *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, 30 March 1987, 3.

Source: Original photograph by Lisa Roberts, 2022.



Figure 3: The scar tree in 2022.

Source: Original photographs by Lisa Roberts, 2022.

This letter guides me in how I respond to people in the Keeping Place as well. The community spoke to the heart of the matter, saying that physically destroying a place on the land does not take it away from us. Our relationship with Country is stronger than owning something or seeing something. Those trees are still over there, you can sit with them, between the medical centre and the Keeping Place.

When the Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place was opened in 1994 there was a huge celebration:

Back then the very existence of this place was very radical. Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (AAV) funded the building of the Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place, they supported bricks and mortar projects at that time, but the Keeping Place has remained independent within GEGAC.⁵⁸

A lot of our mobs were empowered by this place, there were mobs from western districts right up to Sydney way come down to celebrate the Keeping Place being opened. GEGAC being opened as a massive organisation, it was huge. Still today different blackfellas and tourists come through, and they're gobsmacked by how it is presented. I say this is how it was created; I haven't changed anything and people tell me that the Old People have done it really well. 'People come and go, but this place doesn't', as Uncle Russell says.⁵⁹ I love what the Elders wrote here on the sign as the end of the exhibition:

⁵⁸ Uncle Russell Mullett, interview, 6 July 2020.

⁵⁹ Uncle Russell Mullett, interview, 6 July 2020.

Time now to stand up and be counted and be proud. It's not like the mission days, and those early days, when all those things were taken off us and you weren't allowed to speak your language. Yeah, it's happening.

That's a really powerful statement. That's a statement for the Keeping Place being opened: they could talk, they could be proud. We keep here everything that was taken away from them. It's all coming back.



Figure 4: The Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place, a two-storey building surrounded by a landscape of eucalyptus trees and lomandra. The long body of a felled scar tree, placed on a stand and covered with a roof, runs along the left side of the paved entry to the building.

Source: Original photograph by Lisa Roberts, 2022.

Conclusion

The Gunai Kurnai community planned and fought for the Keeping Place for decades. The Elders still show us how to share the truth about what happened here through the permanent exhibition. The Keeping Place, and this paper itself, was made and is being made in its own time, on Country, through the love and energy of community discussion and deep consideration. The Elders included everyone's stories without speaking for people, so that, as Uncle Russell says, the cultural manager may change, people may come and go, but the Keeping Place continues to do the work it was intended to.

We know that the history we have written here is true because community holds that knowledge. We, the Koori community, remember all these things in our everyday lives, and our remembering enables us to care for all the people and beings and places, including colonists, who live with us on Gunai Kurnai Country. We are responsible for everybody here. The Keeping Place was made so that both Koori people and non-Indigenous people could come here to meet with us and with the Ancestor objects and spirits, and this is the approach we have taken in writing this academic history as well. We invite you to consider how our Elders understood cultural health as vital alongside self-determined medical and social organisations and land rights.

Our work here writing this short history extends the work Rob does at the Keeping Place through being 'concerned with the reattachment of our minds, bodies and spirits to the network of relationships and ethical practices' in what we call cultural resurgence.⁶⁰ To share the history of this specific place, we turned to the knowledge the Elders put in the Keeping Place's permanent exhibition and used the space the Elders enabled for our (Rob and Shannon) collaboration. The Elders' creation of the Keeping Place in the face of racist violence is the result of many acts of cultural resurgence intended to facilitate our ongoing expansion of cultural practice and community strength. Writing this article in relation with the Elders' historical knowledge is also an act of cultural resurgence.

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⁶⁰ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 44.

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The *Unsettled* exhibition: Laura McBride and Mariko Smith in conversation¹

Laura McBride and Mariko Smith

Abstract: The Australian Museum's exhibition *Unsettled* opened in May 2021 (following COVID-19 pandemic-related delays) as the museum's response to 2020's 250th anniversary of Lieutenant James Cook's HMB *Endeavour* voyage along the east coast of Australia. In responding to this historical event that continues to have ramifications today, curators and community consultants framed the exhibition as an important opportunity for truth-telling led by First Nations peoples, working with artists and storytellers to put Cook in his place. In December 2021, curators Laura McBride and Dr Mariko Smith delivered the History Council of NSW's Annual History Lecture, discussing the process of creating the exhibition, considering different relationships between the museum and community, and reflecting on the histories they can tell. McBride and Smith conclude the lecture with some critical comments on the nature of museums and the importance of curatorial work to disrupt museum practice. This is an edited transcript of this conversation.

¹ This is an edited version of the 2021 Annual History Lecture, hosted by the History Council of New South Wales (HCNSW). We thank the HCNSW, particularly Catherine Shirley and Stephen Gapps, for their support for publishing this important conversation. Further details about this lecture can be found on the HCNSW website, historycouncilnsw.org.au/whats-on/events/annual-history-lecture-2021/. The full, original conversation is available for viewing as part of the History Week 2021 playlist on the HCNSW's YouTube site (youtu.be/41ogjajkeDw) where it has been split into chapters for easier viewing.

Introducing the speakers and the exhibition



Figure 1: Still image from the 2021 Annual History Lecture recording, featuring Dr Mariko Smith (left) and Laura McBride (right) in conversation, jointly prepared by the History Council of NSW and the Australian Museum.

Source: © History Council of NSW and Australian Museum.

Laura McBride

Yaama kgurra. My name is Laura McBride, and I'm a Wailwan and Kooma woman, and director, First Nations, at the Australian Museum. I was born on Gadigal Country to a Wailwan and Kooma father and an English mother who migrated here with her family at 16 years of age. I grew up between Coonamble and Sydney, undertaking my schooling here in Sydney when living with my mother, and the remaining three months of the year living with my family in Coonamble. From a young age I knew that I wanted to work closely with First Nations cultures, and always had a passion for history, science and museums. Before being appointed to the role of director, I had worked at the Australian Museum for the previous 11 years in the education, programming and exhibition teams. Through my various exhibitions, public programs and projects, I've provided an avenue for cross-cultural communication between the Aboriginal community and the museum's audiences who want to learn from First Nations peoples about Aboriginal cultures, and what Aboriginal peoples have to say on critical issues affecting our communities like climate action and sustainable living.

I see myself as a facilitator of voices rather than creating things in isolation or through consultation. Collaboration, and more accurately co-design, is the model I used across my professional work. Museums have historically been contentious places for Aboriginal people, and they often still don't trust institutions like the Australian Museum who have taken their objects, voices and even bodies, using these things

to define the narrative about us. How we have been represented over time is how we are perceived. And considering we mitigate false and negative stereotypes on a regular basis, it is vitally important that First Nations peoples are involved in the representations of themselves, their cultures and their histories.

The Australian Museum's First Nations team plays a critical role as facilitators of these voices, giving communities an influential and authoritative platform at the museum. We help provide access and pathways to First Nations peoples and cultures. My vision as director includes creating self-determining models across the Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Pasifika cultural and archaeological collections. It's about prioritising and amplifying First Nations voices so that these communities represent themselves and their cultures within the museum.

Mariko Smith

Walawaani nindjiwan. My name is Mariko Smith. I'm a Yuin woman with Japanese heritage and the manager of First Nations Collections and Engagement at the museum. I'm also an honorary associate in the School of Literature, Art and Media at the University of Sydney. I was born on Darug Country in Western Sydney, and later moved north to the Central Coast. Growing up in a multicultural household from a young age, I gained an appreciation of the complexities of identity in contemporary Australia. As a child, I learned more about Japanese language and culture from my mum's side. And as I grew older, I connected more with my dad's extended Aboriginal family from La Perouse and the New South Wales South Coast. I often feel like I challenge people's perceptions of Aboriginality by just existing. I've always loved learning about history, from when I was little. I also learned about how history is complex and needs a nuanced approach in how we engage with it. I vividly remember in primary school learning about Captain Cook pretty much every year. And I have to say, I did get obsessed researching everything I could about his background and life history.

I look back at that time and reflect on how no meaningful Aboriginal perspectives were offered to us students beyond, say, making Rainbow Serpent chalk art on the pavement at school. And there was very little scope for us to critically engage with Cook and his legacy. I now see my being directed to focus solely on Cook like that was a form of brainwashing. Aboriginal peoples and cultures were portrayed as primitive and no longer relevant. It should be about presenting a more balanced, complete picture of our shared history from a range of perspectives that are not merely represented in distilled, simplistic ways. From my experience learning and practising law, to teaching at university, and now specialising in GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums), visual sociology, Indigenous cultural resurgence and public history, I seek more critical engagements with the institutions and systems in place in Australia.

Laura

We would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people as the Custodians of the land on which the Australian Museum stands. And we pay our respects to their Country, Ancestors and Elders. We dedicate the *Unsettled* exhibition to the people and other Beings who keep the law of this land, to the Elders and Traditional Owners of all the knowledges, places and stories within this exhibition, and to the Ancestors and Old People for their resilience and guidance.

We really appreciate this opportunity to share our insights into the experience of building this exhibition from the ground up. Our journey began in the context of the lead-up to the 250th anniversary of Lieutenant James Cook's east coast voyage in 1770. Many cultural institutions were planning their 2020 exhibitions to mark this event.

Mariko

The Australian Museum was in the position to host yet another Cook exhibition, focusing on the man himself and the role he was said to have played in the foundations of what is now known as 'Australia'. However, under the leadership of Kim McKay, the museum's director and CEO, and the executive leadership team, the decision was made to appoint a First Nations curator and for Aboriginal and Torres Islander peoples to have a proper right of reply through this exhibition. Historically, First Nations perspectives on colonial history are often downplayed or ignored.

Laura

As the First Nations curatorial team, with Mariko as the assistant curator, we undertook extensive community consultation from the very start to ensure we accurately represented the views and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and developed this exhibition in a culturally appropriate way. This feedback would direct and inform our exhibition objectives, themes, topics, content and the associated programming.² A total of 805 First Nations people from all across Australia responded to the short survey, which sought their opinions about the Australian Museum's progress on Indigenous engagement, what they really thought of Captain Cook, as well as what they did and did not want to see in an exhibition responding to the 250th Cook anniversary.

2 Laura McBride and Mariko Smith, 'The 2020 Project First Nations Community Consultation Report', 29 June 2021, accessed 21 December 2022, australian.museum/learn/cultures/the-2020-project/#download.

Mariko

Significantly, these consultations made it clear that First Nations people did not need another show about Cook. The consultation had three highest ranking categories: colonisation and its effects, to detail Australia's origins and foundations, and addressing the false constructed history that is pervasively shared in society.

Laura

This was determined from categorising 40 per cent of responses that used various descriptors, such as 'true history', 'the truth' or 'truth-telling', about Cook and Australian history. And even though we had already described the initiative on the survey documents as First Nations-led, it appeared very important for community to keep reinforcing that First Nations perspectives and experiences needed to lead this exhibition. For example, one respondent noted: 'The truth about what happened, not the fairy tale story. Aboriginal people to tell the story; we did not welcome Cook with open arms.'

Mariko

Mob told us that they did not want to be defined by the likes of Cook and colonisers. He seems to operate more so as a marker of time for the beginning of colonisation. As one of our respondents eloquently put it, 'Cook is but a small footnote in a more expansive history', whereas First Nations have been here since time immemorial.

Laura

Instead, the community asked us to take the opportunity for long overdue truth-telling about our shared past. It is clear to First Nations people that we live in a legacy of this past, and this has privileged some but left others disadvantaged, resulting in social inequity. Recognising this is an important step towards a better shared future and can only be done if we discuss this nation's history truthfully together and listen to First Nations voices.

Mariko

Through this, we had the opportunity to address some of the big questions around self-representation in public histories and museums. This raises many lines of inquiry, such as: Whose history or histories are we dealing with? Who can tell these stories? On whose authority? Are we representing or rewriting history? A key provocation for this presentation is the idea of speaking for ourselves, whether this is inside or outside the authority of institutions, or entirely on our own terms.

Laura

Now, more than ever, there are calls for cultural institutions to be more active in these important public conversations around justice, whether this is social justice or climate justice. How do we, as First Nations people, first and foremost, followed by our careers as museum workers, navigate our community-informed best industry practice approach across tensions in the divides between the personal and the professional?

The meaning of ‘Unsettled’ as the title for this exhibition

Mariko

So, Laura – ultimately the first thing that the public engaged with regarding our exhibition is the title itself: Unsettled. I think we need to start from there.

Laura

That’s right. So we had the themes and topics for the entire exhibition before we actually knew what we were going to call the exhibition itself. And we had worked with an amazing media company called IndigenousX, and together our teams brainstormed a series of titles, but essentially ‘Unsettled’ was the strongest as it has many connotations. Australia wasn’t peacefully settled. Relationships between First Nations peoples and Australians are still uneasy. Our history is unresolved.

Mariko

And our relationships with the environment – if you only just look back at the 2019–20 bushfires as well as human-created climate change – are also unsettled.

Laura

Absolutely. So, after 250 years of occupying this country, the relationship between newcomers and the environment is unstable. And when we first started discussing the title across the museum, there was a small amount of pushback from particular staff who thought that it might be a divisive title. But then there were reflections by other staff who said: ‘Well, Unsettled, that fits with me. I’m going to feel really unsettled walking through this exhibition.’ And that made us think about the ways in which the visitor really centres themselves even in a truth-telling exhibition where our people are finally getting to have their say most.

Mariko

I see 'Unsettled' as a state of being, but also as a verb is 'unsettling'. So I think it's wonderful how it just plays on so many levels.

Laura

And some of the content may be unsettling, but it's the truth. And we can't hide from that. And unsettling histories or stories can make us think about new things and new ways to move forward.

Mariko

And to have these important conversations is a provocation, but also an inspiration and a motivation.

Exhibition Section One: *Unsettled* Introduction

Laura

The *Unsettled* exhibition encourages audiences to have the ability to consider histories and perspectives that they might not know. And so the objects that were used in the introductory section raise questions or inform people about particular things that might go against stereotypes or representations that they may have thought about Aboriginal people, culture or history. One of these objects that we include is the Manly mogo.³ This 'mogo', meaning stone axe in the Sydney language, was handed over to a young girl in Manly in the 1830s.

It's one of only two known complete, pre-European hafted stone axes within museum collections, so it's a rare object having come from Sydney.⁴ Why we included this particular object is actually not because of the incredible nature of the Manly mogo itself, but the fact that Manly Cove was named after the manly and physical prowess of Aboriginal men by Governor Arthur Phillip. When the colonists wouldn't bring the long boat closer to shore in this cove to confront or engage with Aboriginal people, the Aboriginal men on the shore dropped their spears and started swimming out to the boat to confront them. And Phillip described that as very manly behaviour. This goes against stereotypes of Aboriginal people needing salvation, for instance, or the fact that Aboriginal people weren't well kept or didn't have their own societies or laws and knowledges. And so, in particular, that's why we use that object.

³ Australian Museum, 'Manly Mogo', updated 30 August 2021, accessed 21 December 2022, australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/unsettled-introduction/manly-mogo/.

⁴ Attenbrow, *Sydney's Aboriginal Past*, 90; Attenbrow et al., 'Non-destructive Provenancing of Ground-Edged Mafic Artifacts', 173–86.



Figure 2: Manly mogo (stone axe), 1836. Made by Ancestor.

Metamorphic stone, wood, plant fibre. Australian Museum Collection.

Source: Abram Powell. © Australian Museum.

Mariko

Phillip and others in the First Fleet would have been familiar with the writings of Cook, Sir Joseph Banks and others on the *Endeavour*, where they wrote about Aboriginal people being these passive cowards who would just run away. And then this contrasted with Phillip's direct experiences with Aboriginal men. And so, I think even back then, people would have been thinking very differently and have different perspectives. So, that was a great story. We just wanted to draw that out and share that with the public.

Laura

Regarding the curation of this exhibition, this is the first exhibition that I've curated that has a linear order. And it's also the first exhibition I've curated in third-person language. There were reasons for this. There is so much information that people don't know about their own history. We had to put it in an order by which they could understand it or map it out with at least some anchors within their own understanding of history. Cultural exhibitions don't need a beginning and an end necessarily.

Mariko

Laura, with your previous exhibitions like *Garrigarrang: Sea Country* or *GADI*, there were multiple pathways for visitors to engage with the themes and the topics. Whereas with *Unsettled*, because it's got that sort of historical base and that chronology, 1770, 1788, other dates, it just became a more sort of linear chronological order. And we chose to write this exhibition in the third person, which is pretty standard for most exhibitions and cultural institutions and represents the voice of authority. It's the museum speaking.

Laura

That's right. In our exhibitions, we usually use first person to give audiences the understanding that Aboriginal people are still here and still in control of their narratives. But we didn't want it to be an 'us versus them' narrative. So we wrote this exhibition in the third person and it is factual, it is up to the standard of all the other exhibitions that we do at the Australian Museum. And we felt that was the best approach to take.

Exhibition Section Two: Signal Fires

Laura

The second section, 'Signal Fires', is an immersive experience. We worked with communities between the New South Wales South Coast and Sydney to capture their views on Cook, the 1770 event from the shore – and from the shore only. Signal fires are deliberately lit fires at certain locations, which are an emergency warning system to people in the area, but also for neighbouring communities that something's just not quite right. Within each section of the exhibition, we facilitated the voices of those people who are entitled to tell these stories. My family, for instance, is not from any coastal areas and so my role was as facilitator. And, for instance, within the 'Signal Fires' section, each object or story told within that section comes from a descendant of someone who lit the signal fires or whose family hold the stories of those signal fires.

Mariko

We could talk about how we curated the content. So, Laura, through your previous exhibitions, but also with this one, you curated through community. And then I guess from my perspective, with my background in academic research and history, I tended to curate from the archive, namely historical, colonial documents.

Laura

I wanted to be sure that if I was undertaking what we were calling a First Nations perspective and First Nations-led, that I wasn't led by colonial archives or records. I wanted to genuinely make sure that we were bringing our perspectives to the forefront. I was at Uncle Max Harrison's house when he first told me the story of the 'Fighting Westwind' around Ulladulla. He was telling me that before arriving in Sydney, that Cook actually tried to make landfall on the South Coast, but everybody came together and sung up the Fighting Westwind, danced up the Fighting Westwind. And when I left Uncle Max's house, I was heading back to the museum and I rang Mariko and said: 'Can you just go and have a look at the records and see if there's any alignment whatsoever?'

Mariko

Yeah, so I just hopped onto the computer because a lot of these historical records are now digitised (and we need to ensure there is more funding to make sure we could do that more!). And I looked at Cook's *Endeavour* journal and looking around in mid- to late April 1770 period when he was cruising up the coast, and there was an entry from Sunday 22 April in which he talked about seeing the smoke of fire in several places near the sea beach.

But he also said:

When we first discover'd this Island in the morning I was in hopes, from its appearance, that we should have found Shelter for the Ship behind it; but when we came to approach it near I did not think that there was even security for a Boat to land. But this, I believe, I should have attempted had not the wind come on Shore, after which I did not think it safe to send a Boat from the Ship, as we had a large hollow Sea from the South-East rowling in upon the land, which beat every where very high upon the Shore; and this we have had ever since we came upon the Coast.⁵

I feel like that really correlated with what Uncle Max was saying to Laura. This is how 'Living Legacies' – the name of this immersive experience – came about, referencing that these are the descendants; they are telling and living these stories that are from the past, but are a part of our living legacies today. So Amanda Jane Reynolds, who's an Aboriginal woman who leads Stella Stories, has worked extensively with South Coast community members to produce this beautiful film.⁶

⁵ Cook journal, 22 April 1770, Project Gutenberg Australia, accessed 21 December 2022, gutenberg.net.au/ebooks/e00043.html.

⁶ Muruwari playwright Jane Harrison presented the play *The Visitors* at the 2020 Sydney Festival, and it also engages with concept of the smoke signals, and imagines the organising that would have happened between Aboriginal groups up and down the coast in response to the British visitors: Sydney Festival, 'Sydfest 2020: The Visitors 22–26 January', 2020, sydneyfestival.org.au/events/the-visitors.

Exhibition Section Three: Contested Possession

Laura

‘Signal Fires’ really focuses on that 1770 event when Cook mapped the east coast of Australia, but really, invasion came in 1788. Now, Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Islander peoples, both groups compound those events. For many, 1770 and 1788 is one and the same. So, Cook might have mapped the east coast and 18 years later, Phillip comes with the First Fleet. But essentially, when the events are compounded, it’s Cook who’s invaded. It’s this man who’s taken everything from us. And that is because Cook was actually celebrated. Not in the early colony, but really in the late 1800s, early 1900s. You see Cook start to emerge as this figure, as this hero.⁷ So that leads us into our next section, which is ‘Recognising Invasions’. Invasions did happen in this country across every Sovereign Nation. Can we first quickly speak about the Kaurareg people and their story, which I believe is not that well known, considering the significance of the site.⁸

Mariko

We know indirectly about them through the name of ‘Possession Island’, this island that’s just off the west side of what is now known as Cape York from the mainland. And this is the island where, on 22 August 1770, Cook landed and he got the flag or his crew got the flag and they basically hoisted up the colours and claimed the east coast; the west coast they could not claim because of the Dutch navigators who’d previously been there, but Cook claimed the east coast in the name of King George III of Great Britain.⁹ So we only really know about this island, that it’s just been renamed as Possession Island.

Laura

But most people would think that possession of Australia was taken at La Perouse or Botany Bay, right?

⁷ See also other commentaries, such as the film *Too Many Captain Cooks* (1989), Ronin Films, www.roninfilms.com.au/feature/604/too-many-captain-cooks.html.

⁸ The National Museum of Australia also shared stories from the island now known commonly as ‘Possession Island’ in their exhibition *Endeavour Voyage* (2020–21), ‘Bedanug, Thunadha, Bedhan Lag, Tuidin – Possession Island’, accessed 21 December 2022, www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/endeavour-voyage/bedanug-thunadha-bedhan-lag-tuidin-possession-island.

⁹ ‘Having satisfied myself of the great Probability of a passage, thro’ which I intend going with the Ship, and therefore may land no more upon this Eastern coast of New Holland, and on the Western side I can make no new discovery, the honour of which belongs to the Dutch Navigators, but the Eastern Coast from the Latitude of 38 degrees South down to this place, I am confident, was never seen or Visited by any European before us.’ Cook journal, 22 August 1770, gutenberg.net.au/ebooks/e00043.html.

Mariko

You'd think so because that's where the first landfall was, on 29 April. Four months or so earlier – you'd think that would've happened then. There's a lot of these sorts of inconsistencies or things that just kind of don't add up. And so why would it be all the way in August at this particular island that possession was said to have happened? And this island is known by many names including Tuined. And we have been told this by senior men from the Kaurareg First Nation people. We worked very closely with Uncle Waubin Richard Aken. He's also the appointed tribal historian. So it was just such a privilege to speak with Uncle Waubin and learn from him.

And he was telling Laura and me about how Cook did not land on their island. We also looked at Joseph Banks's journal as well and he talks about these 10 warriors being on the shore watching them.¹⁰ And so nine had lances, so that means spears, and one had a bow and arrow set. And when we talked to Uncle Waubin, he was saying to us that, yes, the warriors were watching because they knew that this ship was going to come, they had the warnings from what he called the 'Blackfella Internet', so with the signal fires, but also message sticks and messengers who were coming up the coast.¹¹ And they knew something was coming so they were waiting on the shore. And they were waiting for their leader to give the signal, basically, if these strangers were to disembark and try and arrive on the shore, they would have attacked.

Laura

So you have *Endeavour* passengers, James Maria (Mario) Matra and Banks who were keeping really solid records across the whole journey. And yet the account of possession, on Possession Island, on the island itself, doesn't seem to be in their records. So, there's several things here. There are different accounts, but also the fact that people don't even know that the possession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait lands now known as the east coast of Australia took place on this island off the west coast of Cape York. Why do we not know this history as Indigenous Australians or non-Indigenous Australians, more openly?

Mariko

We do reflect upon how it is a contested history. We call this subsection in the beginning of this 'Recognising Invasions' section 'Contested Possession', because there are various accounts of this one event and these accounts don't necessarily corroborate; they can conflict, which is what you see here when Uncle Waubin said

10 'We saw 10 Indians standing on a hill; 9 were armed with lances as we had been used [*sic*] to see them, the tenth had a bow and arrows.' Cook journal, 21 August 1770, gutenberg.net.au/ebooks05/0501141h.html.

11 See Australian Museum, 'Sovereignty, False Pretences without the Rightful Consent', updated 3 September 2021, accessed 21 December 2022, australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/recognising-invasions/sovereignty/.

they did not land because what would have happened is they would have speared them. And Cook in particular, they would have just cut off his head and boiled it and then they would trade with Papua New Guinea because there were a lot of those connections with the other cultures and peoples from New Guinea to Melanesia, Asia as well, and this head would have had trade value.

Laura

The ‘Recognising Invasions’ section then goes on and deals primarily with what we see as colonial records and voices, because in this particular theme and topic what we were addressing went back to the consultation where First Nations people asked us what went on between 1770 and 1788, and why did they think they had the right to come here and do this.

Mariko

It’s interesting that there are people who think that Cook came with the First Fleet in 1788, but in fact he was dead nearly nine years before – he died in Hawaii in 1779. And 1779 was also a year that the British Parliament were debating about convict transportation because they had this big social problem of convicts and at the same time the American Revolutionary War. So there are all these factors that kind of played into the decision of why New South Wales was picked as a British colony.

Laura

What I think we should talk about here is the complete erasure of James Matra, who the Sydney suburb of Matraville is named after. We find out that really, it’s Matra who, more so than Cook, was a key player in the colonisation of Australia and for really quite personal purposes.

Mariko

And that’s something that we draw out with the ‘Plans for a Colony’ sub-section. So having on display Sir Joseph Banks’s testimony to the 1779 Bunbury Parliamentary Committee on convict transportation, but also Matra’s own proposal that he brought to the table to British Parliament. And we show an example of what is an agenda note from a British cabinet meeting where Matra wanted to bring this up.¹²

12 Select Committee on Convicts, *Report of the Select Committee on Convicts 1779*; McNab, ‘James Maria Matra’s Proposal’, *Historical Records of New Zealand*, Vol. I, 35–46, nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-McN01Hist-t1-front-d1-d1.html. See Australian Museum, ‘Plans for a Colony’, updated 31 September 2021, accessed 21 December 2022, australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/recognising-invasions/plans-for-a-colony/.

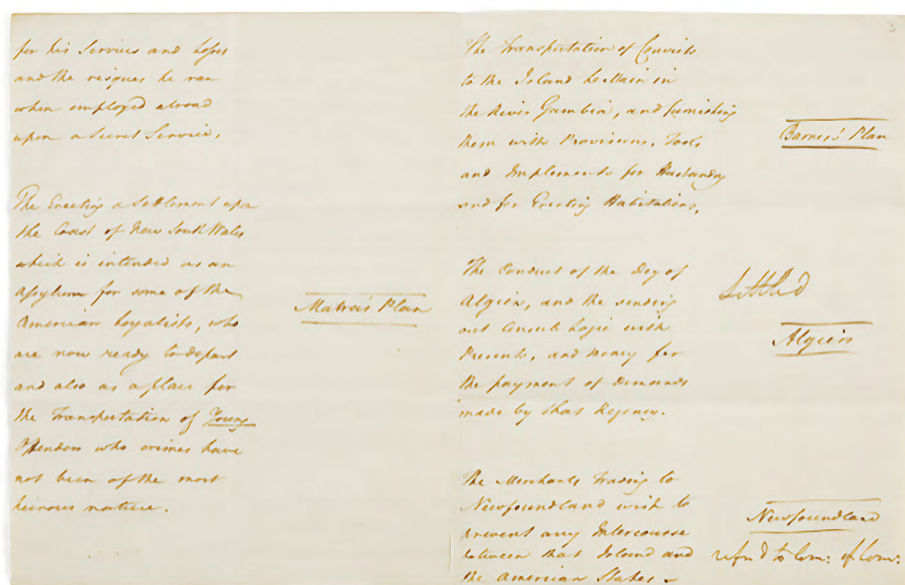


Figure 3: Sir Evan Nepean, 'Memo of Matters to Be Brought before Cabinet', c. November 1874. Ink on paper.

Loaned from the State Library of New South Wales for the *Unsettled* exhibition.

Source: Australian Museum.

Laura

So often we're told Australia is a population of convicts and it was harsh for convicts to come here and this was essentially the beginning. But really Australia was selected because land was needed. It was in a good position of the world in trade for spices and other goods, this was mentioned also in parliamentary records.¹³ And so we need to think about what circumstances were going on and stop trying to place this false narrative. When Matra was corresponding with Lord Sydney, he later wrote 'it was observed that New South Wales would be a very proper region for the reception of criminals condemned to transportation'¹⁴ as what was happening at the time involved many prison hulks in London, blocking other ships from coming in and therefore blocking the economy.

¹³ See Tink, 'The Role of Parliamentary Committee Witnesses in the Foundation of Australia', 33–38.

¹⁴ McNab, 'James Maria Matra's Proposal'. See Australian Museum, 'James Maria Matra', updated 3 September 2021, accessed 21 December 2022, australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/recognising-invasions/plans-for-a-colony/#James-Maria-Matra.

Exhibition Section Four: Fighting Wars

Laura

Something that came out strongly in the consultation material was telling the truth about the wars. Wars were fought in this country. People fought for their families, their homelands and their cultures. 'Fighting Wars' is then the next section of the *Unsettled* exhibition, where we specifically look at the definition of war itself, what that is, and investigate where wars were fought in this country.

Mariko

Yes, that's right, because I think that's something people would just say: 'Oh, well, it doesn't fit the definition of war.'

Laura

But it's interesting, isn't it, Mariko, with the fact that people say, 'Well, in regards to this definition of war', but actually that's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about an intention. We're talking about a military campaign, and Australia was colonised with a high amount of military.

Mariko

Well, that's it. Starting off as a penal colony, but there was a strong military presence. And then the fact that, I think, the first five colonial governors of New South Wales were military men. They all had distinguished records in the army. Just thinking of Governor Macquarie who we deal with later on. I think he was in colonial India. And so he applied a lot of those military tactics in how he engaged with the so-called 'hostile natives'. We were looking at a lot of that language through material of the time, like there were newspapers that actually used the word 'war'.¹⁵ This is why it's a little bit funny when people just go, 'it wasn't a war'.

Laura

Everybody living at the time was describing their experience as living in a war. And so, although *Unsettled* is a First Nations' perspective, we include several sources that illustrate perspectives of people at the time, as well as maps illustrating conflict. If we look at something like the Warrego Map, which identified areas of New South Wales in which people were trying to farm and grow the economy, there were safe

¹⁵ Australian Museum, 'Fighting Wars', updated 5 October 2021, accessed 21 December 2022, australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/fighting-wars/.

pathways marked on this map that are blocked by logos that have spears as identifiers to say ‘don’t go here’ – there are savage natives or savage Aborigines in the area still defending their territories. So they mark two main things: waterless country and where the Aboriginal people were still able to defend their territories.¹⁶ What’s quite interesting is Bourke in far-west New South Wales; when looking at this map, Bourke is marked as ‘Fort Bourke’. And so there are these things that drop out of history, they’re forgotten or they’re deliberately forgotten ...



Figure 4: Raymond Timbery (Bidjigal Dharrawal) and Joel Deaves (Gumea Dharrawal), Death Spear, 2021.

Silcrete, resin, plant fibre, sinew, shell, mingo (grass tree). Australian Museum Collection Acquisition. Source: Abram Powell. © Raymond Timbery and Joel Deaves; photograph from Australian Museum.

We started with the first war, the Sydney Wars, which raged across what’s known now as the Sydney Basin for 29 years. A period of warfare and non-warfare. Diplomatic attempts were taken across this time. This is where you see Governor Macquarie start to give out breastplates at the native feasts in order to try and get people onside to establish a system of leadership and cooperation where they would like to talk to one person instead of several different people, the opening of the Native Institute and a whole range of different things. But still Aboriginal people weren’t conforming. And then we have heroes in this story such as Pemulwuy, who has such an important story. And there’s a particular turning point in that Sydney War where Pemulwuy spears the colony’s gamekeeper, McIntyre. And so we worked with some Bidjigal descendants, Raymond Timbery and Joel Deaves, to recreate a death spear. There

16 Australian Museum, ‘The Approach to the Warrego Country map, c. 1845’, updated 31 August 2021, accessed 21 December 2022, australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/fighting-wars/warrego-country-map/.

are no death spears within museum collections that we know of. So the men used colonial records, as well as speaking to their Elders, to recreate an object like the one used by Pemulwuy on that day to spear the colony's gamekeeper.¹⁷

Mariko

Some of the research we undertook was looking at archaeological writings about what sort of material was used. We used some of those colonial documents to help us describe, I think it's like silcrete, shells, a yellow substance which I think would be resin from Gadi (grass tree). We talked to the community members and provided this information, but then gave them that sort of autonomy. And it's part of that self-determining practices as well, like communities tell these stories.

Laura

Communities take colonial records that may include information that was lost throughout the colonisation process and then they have to put it back together through their Elders and their cultural lens to really interpret what's happening there. But this is a lot of how cultural revitalisation is working within museums – for example, the revitalisation of nawi making, which is the tied-bark canoe from the east coast here, or possum skin cloak making – all very much the same coming in to use the collections themselves, archival records, as well as living cultural knowledge to be able to revitalise these cultural practices.

But really, what I want to talk about here, because it leads us to our next section, is where we are at the end of that Sydney War. We're at 26, 27 years in, and there is a significant event that sets the pathway for the colonisation of the rest of Australia. The governor and many other people are fed up by this time. Can you tell us what you found in the records, particularly around the Appin massacre?

Mariko

I think 1816 is a key year. So Governor Lachlan Macquarie, who we've spoken about – how he was a military man, a very experienced strategist. He wrote in his Governor's Memorandum and Diary book of the 'hostile natives', the problems they pose and how he has tried in frustration to really control and manage the situation by trying to negotiate with them, but then it's come to the point where there needs to be punitive action.¹⁸ And so he gave instructions to a number of military detachments to basically carry out punitive expeditions, which was to punish Aboriginal people who did not conform to his societal order he was trying to implement.

17 Australian Museum, 'The Sydney Wars', updated 31 August 2021, accessed 21 December 2022, australianmuseum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/fighting-wars/sydney-wars/.

18 Australian Museum, 'The Appin Massacre', updated 31 August 2021, accessed 21 December 2022, australianmuseum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/fighting-wars/appin-massacre/.

Laura

But within those records, Mariko, what we find is also some cover-ups, right?

Mariko

That's right. So he gave very clear instructions to the three leaders of those detachments that were meant to go across south-west Sydney, that they were only meant to respond by firing if there was resistance, they were meant to spare women and children. It was very clear, like he was trying to follow this particular sort of rules of warfare. And with Appin, in regards to Captain James Wallis, who led a detachment through south-west Sydney, they ended up carrying out a night raid. And so, what opportunity was there for the men, women and children who were camping to offer up any resistance?¹⁹

Laura

But what I'm talking about is the cover-up in the records: the fact that when writing back to England, when they know innocent women and children have died, but that's all covered up. But what's really interesting is we can look at the evidence within museums and from the three people that were hung in the trees – we know that one of those people was a female.

Mariko

That's right. We are presented with various accounts. You had Governor Macquarie's instructions, you had Wallis's diary entry from that fateful night, but also how Macquarie reported back to his superior, the Earl of Bathurst. And also there was a young boy who lived in that area and he was around when the news of this massacre happened. And as an old man, he wrote his recollections about this event – William Byrne wrote that there were three bodies, not the two that Wallis had reported back to Macquarie. It was all these little discrepancies in play. And then also the way that Macquarie reported back to the Earl of Bathurst was that Wallis met some resistance and that's why they responded in that way.

Laura

The Appin massacre essentially sets a pathway, doesn't it? A pathway for massacres to become the key tool to be used across the rest of the colonisation process in Australia.

19 Australian Museum, 'The Appin Massacre'.

Exhibition Section Five: Remembering Massacres

Mariko

There is Governor Macquarie's proclamation not long after the Appin massacre, where basically he's declaring de facto war on the Aboriginal people in New South Wales.²⁰ And a lot of what he was stipulating in this proclamation was around controlling the movement of Aboriginal people; it has all the hallmarks of later protectionist policies. So more of this way of just trying to strike out at all this resistance and just really suppress that. It indicated the strategy at play, which as the colony expanded, the violence and the massacres continued to follow. So that leads us into 'Remembering Massacres'. Did you want to speak to us about this section, Laura?

Laura

Absolutely. Massacres are a completely unhealed element of conversation in communities. In Australia, we live in towns where roads, bridges, libraries or institutions are named after people who perpetrated massacres but are lauded in local histories as heroes who set up these towns. It's once again the different perspectives of history. In this section of the exhibition we utilise the University of Newcastle's study.

Mariko

Yes. That's the massacre mapping project. From those early years of the colony, 1788 up to the last documented massacre, which was, I believe 1928.²¹ The research team mapped documented massacres. They define massacre in a very particular way. I really encourage you all to look at their website where they've got the full scope of what they were researching. It doesn't include all the undocumented massacres, we just had to be mindful of that. But what is really powerful about how their data were being presented in the massacre map that's in *Unsettled* is the extent and the spread of the colony and the illustration of the violence that went hand in hand with it.

Laura

Essentially, you can see that massacres align directly with the colonisation of Australia, but the massacre map is data and data can work in many forms for particular people. Historians love data, scientists love data, but what do our visitors think? If they see this map light up red with all the massacres, are they really empathising with those data? So right next to that, within the exhibition design, we actually have images of landscapes where massacres occurred. And what type of photography was used in those photos, Mariko?

²⁰ Australian Museum, 'The Appin Massacre'.

²¹ Ryan et al., *Colonial Frontier Massacres in Eastern Australia 1788 to 1930*, Vol. 2.1, University of Newcastle, 2018, c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/introduction.php.



Figure 5: Rottnest Island prison, Western Australia, 1838–1931.

'The Quad' on Rottnest Island, built with forced labour by the Aboriginal prisoners. The site of executions and many brutalities. Originally the prison where many hundreds died in misery, this building was turned into a hotel and only closed in 2018. Reproduction of the photograph. Australian Museum Collection Digital Acquisition.

Source: Photograph by Brendan Beirne. © Brendon Beirne.



Figure 6: Hawkesbury River, 1790s.

Reproduction of the photograph. Australian Museum Collection Digital Acquisition.

Source: Photograph by Brendan Beirne. © Brendon Beirne.

Mariko

It was this sort of infrared technology, because it is black-and-white photos that are just very stark. It's unnerving, actually, to look at it. It's not quite like how we would see these places in every day. So I think our visitors would be reflecting upon this imagery by photographer Brendan Beirne in his *Dark Days* photographic series.²²

Laura

It's like an image of somewhere you've gone on a holiday. It's an image of, say, your parents' property; these are familiar sites. And so we have the map and show some of the sites/landscapes. It just raises the question for those visitors, that the areas in which we live, work and play have these hidden histories.

That takes us to some of the other records that we include in this area. The fact that Aboriginal people are often told that, well, at the time of colonisation life was hard on both sides, and that's just the way it was. Can you talk about the Myall Creek letter and why that's not necessarily the case?

Mariko

The Myall Creek letter was by a Sydneysider writing back to a relative in England. They were following the 1838 trial of the people responsible for the Myall Creek massacre. This person had followed the trial and also witnessed the later executions. And even by that standard, they knew it was wrong to kill innocent men, women and children in cold blood.

Laura

Can you just tell us a little bit about what we found in Emily Creaghe's diary?

Mariko

Emily Creaghe is someone who's celebrated as a trailblazer. The first white woman to have ventured west into what is the Gulf Country area. She wrote about Aboriginal people, describing cruel acts towards them, whether it's about tying up an Aboriginal woman or going to a homestead and seeing 40 pairs of Aboriginal people's ears nailed on the wall, in a way that normalised the cruelty towards Aboriginal people.²³

22 Australian Museum, 'Dark Days: A Photo Essay by Brendan Beirne', updated 31 August 2021, accessed 21 December 2022, australian.museum/learn/first-nations/dark-days-brendan-beirne/.

23 Australian Museum, 'Emily Caroline Creaghe's Diary, 1883', updated 31 August 2021, accessed 21 December 2022, australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/remembering-massacres/emily-caroline-creaghe-diary/.

Laura

A woman was brought in on the back of a horse tied up by a rope and they tied her to the tree, and the whole time she was trying to escape. Emily Creaghe wrote things like, 'I don't understand why she doesn't like her new life. We've literally gone out there and got this savage and brought her onto the property where she's going to have a great life', her descriptions are very typical of similar perspectives today: Why don't Aboriginal people learn to live like this? Or why don't Aboriginal people conform like this?

Leaving the 'Fighting Wars' and 'Remembering Massacres' sections we deal with two quite important points. The first I want to discuss with you is the concept of 'Lest We For/Get Over It' (which is technically part of 'Fighting Wars').²⁴

Mariko

This is a great illustration by artist Sam Wallman, which incorporates both 'lest we forget', as we say every year on Anzac Day to always remember the sacrifices made by Australian men and women in overseas conflict, and also 'get over it', which is something that Aboriginal people hear constantly, particularly around Invasion Day, our Day of Mourning and remembering the people who have fallen with the frontier wars and massacres. So as a combination it is a way of saying there are discrepancies but also the hypocrisy as well.²⁵

Laura

Colonisation didn't happen in the distant past. In fact, colonisation is still ongoing. Now, considering within the massacre mapping project that a significant amount of massacres were undertaken by police and military, there's been no healing of that relationship in recent times. And that leads us into very similar issues we're having with deaths in custody and an average of a death in custody once every three weeks.

Mariko

So there is this Tony Albert glasswork piece featured, based on an earlier photographic series he did called *Brothers*.²⁶ He saw a group of Aboriginal men at a 2012 protest rally against police brutality with targets painted on their chest. Tony was really struck by that imagery. And so through his photography and now this glasswork he has represented this. And I think doing it in that stained glass medium as well, it communicates that idea about the people who get to be commemorated in that way, like saints and royalty; it's very striking.

²⁴ Australian Museum, 'Lest We For/Get Over It', updated 31 August 2021, accessed 21 December 2022, australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/fighting-wars/lest-we-forget-over-it/.

²⁵ Australian Museum, 'Lest We For/Get Over It'.

²⁶ Australian Museum, 'Brothers (The Prodigal Son II) 2020', updated 31 August 2021, accessed 21 December 2022, australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/remembering-massacres/brothers-the-prodigal-son/.



Figure 7: Tony Albert (Girramay, Kuku Yalanji), *Brothers (The Prodigal Son II)*, 2020.

Glass, lead, photographic decal, steel, stone. Australian Museum Collection Acquisition.

Source: Abram Powell. © Tony Albert; Australian Museum (image).

Exhibition Section Six: Surviving Genocide

Mariko

So, Laura, our next section is ‘Surviving Genocide’. And genocide is this word that a lot of people do feel confronted by. It’s a legal term as well, and it was really important to unpack what we mean by this.²⁷ The fact is, genocide is what happened here in Australia. If you look at the UN definition of what genocide is, what happened in Australia fits all those categories.

Laura

It was important for us to establish what definition we were working within. A major component of genocide is the removal of people from their traditional lands onto missions, reserves and stations. This section features numerous objects, but I’d like to speak about one in particular that’s connected to my family. My father was born in a fringe camp at Montkeila Bend in Walgett in 1957. Some people think that colonisation and these events happened a long time ago, but I’m the first generation in my family to be born off missions and reserves.

His upbringing was in what our family would call a camp. And we felt it was interesting to start to explore some of those textures and feelings around what was going on in missions and reserves. My father and I collected tin from an old mission and my father constructed a miniature fringe camp wall to identify the types of houses, places and spaces that Aboriginal people were living in at this particular time. Within this section, we also talk about domestic servitude, the fact that Aboriginal people made the best with what they had, featuring some hessian bags. And so we look at multiple different elements of people’s experiences on missions and reserves to give a more holistic story. But for each object, exhibition or quote within the show, we actually co-designed and facilitated that work with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

Mariko

So the next topic is Stolen Generations. Now that is a topic that many Australians are familiar with.

27 United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, ‘Genocide’, accessed 21 December 2022, www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml.

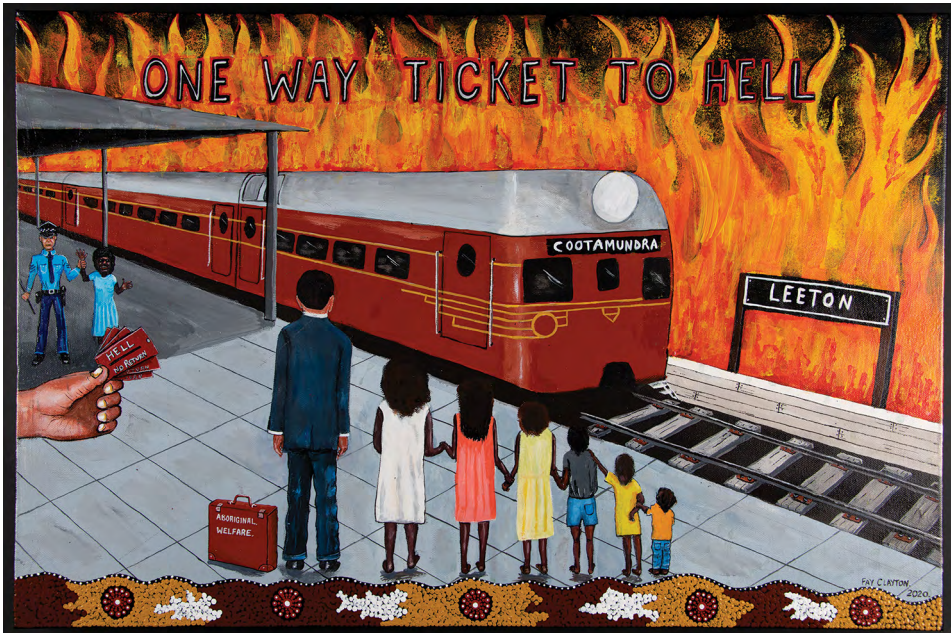


Figure 8: Auntie Fay Moseley (Wiradjuri), *One Way Ticket to Hell*, 2012–20.

Acrylic on canvas. Reproduction of the artwork.

Source: Australian Museum Collection Digital Acquisition. © Auntie Fay Moseley.

Laura

That's right. And it's one people can relate to regarding the genocide definition itself. We worked with surviving members of the Stolen Generations so that they could tell their stories. Each piece in the Stolen Generation section touches on a first-person story. And we were honoured to present these stories, some of which we knew and some of which we learned through the *Unsettled* curation process. Auntie Fay Moseley's painting, *Ticket to Hell*, shows her and her siblings being taken to a train station and removed to Central Station in the first instance, and then onto Kinchela Boys' Home and Cootamundra Girls' Home from there.²⁸

What is important about this piece is that there's often this idea that Aboriginal children were taken for their own good. But if you look at someone like Auntie Fay Moseley whose father was a Rat of Tobruk, he had an exemption certificate, both her parents worked full time at the cannery, and her grandmother actually owned their home – they conformed to the criteria of what White Australia required from them, but the children were still taken away.

²⁸ Australian Museum, 'Stolen Generations', updated 1 September 2021, accessed 21 December 2022, australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/surviving-genocide/stolen-generations/.

Aunty Fay describes it very briefly and quite interestingly by saying, 'It wasn't about giving me an education. I was an A grade student. They wanted to make me D grade, D for domestic service'. It's these personal stories that we find makes *Unsettled* so strong.

Exhibition Section Seven: Continued Resistance

Mariko

This section refers to how we have always been resisting. It's never stopped. From artistic resistance to cultural resistance.

Laura

Political resistance, resistance across the frontier at the brunt of colonisation across Australia. We deal with a range of different types of resistance, and in particular, ongoing resistance starting in 1788 continuing through to today in 2021.

Mariko

This section also investigates who gets commemorated in our history. One of your favourite pieces, *Blood Money*, investigates who we commemorate on our notes of currency and history, and how we can focus on the resistance fighters that we look up to.²⁹

Laura

Blood Money is one of my favourite pieces within the *Unsettled* exhibition. Blood money is often used to describe money obtained at the cost of another's life. This series by Dr Ryan Presley explores the extent to which Australia's wealth has been built on a history of exploitation and violence. Arguably, the bulk of Australia's economy functions off Aboriginal dispossession. On some notes, the dollar value is replaced by the infinity symbol, a gesture to the ongoing and unquantifiable damage brought by colonisation. The version of history represented on Australia's currency is primarily that of white settler figures. In contrast, *Blood Money* promotes important Aboriginal people, testifying to their intelligence and resilience; their legitimate actions standing in contrast to the many colonial myths that Aboriginal people were passive and lacked the will to resist colonial encroachment.

29 Australian Museum, 'Blood Money', updated 29 November 2021, accessed 21 December 2022, australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/continued-resistance/sovereignty/.



Figure 9: Ryan Presley (Marri Ngarr), *Blood Money – Fifty Dollar Note – Fanny Balbuk Commemorative*, 2011.

Source: Australian Museum Collection Digital Acquisition. © Dr Ryan Presley.

I first saw *Blood Money* at the Tarnanthi festival in 2019 and was just taken aback by them. I thought they were some of the greatest pieces of art that I'd seen, and bringing them into the museum and a little bit outside of that art gallery context was to associate each of these *Blood Money* pieces with a cultural object. Let's take for instance someone like Fanny Balbuk. There was the first time I had heard Fanny Balbuk's story. Fanny Balbuk is a resistance fighter, a Noongar woman from Western Australia. And we went to our collections to see if we could find a wanna, a Noongar digging stick, to associate with this *Blood Money* piece. But actually we only found a metal wanna. Which was unsuitable for us, wasn't it, Mariko?

Mariko

Oh, yes, that's right. And so this was another opportunity for us because we wanted to work with communities, and this was a really great opportunity to support communities in this way because *Unsettled* has that potential to really impact on socio-economic outcomes as well. And so by commissioning a work from a Noongar artist, Heidi Mippy, we were able to include a wanna and also make a really great network with Noongar mob.

Laura

At the back end of 'Continued Resistance', we have a really strong self-determining piece representing male Ancestors and the role they played in resistance and survival called *Keeper of the Law, Keeper of the Song, Keeper of the Dance* by Jai Darby Walker. I had been watching Jai undertake his artistic practice on social media for a number of years and he has this amazing talent to be able to capture the look and feel and spirit of the Old People. There were these fantastic old warriors that when I saw

them I said they have to go in *Unsettled* and I wasn't quite sure in what way or at one point, because a lot of *Unsettled* changed as we developed the exhibition. Having conversations and looking at our collections and working with certain artists. And this was a really good opportunity for us to also critique the Australian Museum and cultural institutions' role in how they define and represent our cultures.

Mariko

It's not just to expect the Australian public to embark on a journey of truth-telling, our institutions need to be a part of this as well, and the Australian Museum is no different. We need to critically reflect upon the Australian Museum's own practices of representation of Aboriginal and Torres Islander peoples and cultures. And often when these great cultural objects enter museums they get decontextualised, stripped of all their cultural meanings. Often the information about how they were made and who by has just been stripped away and ignored, discarded. And once they come into the museum registration process, they become simplified into something part of the taxonomy system. They become a 'club' in our collections, for example, where we are showing a display of so-called 'clubs', but we see them as law sticks and they're much more complex than just being classified as a hunter/gatherer tool.

Laura

This classification gives it a very savage and simplistic nature when in fact these are very complex, very detailed, engraved objects that we know weren't used for clubbing things. They fit well with these old men of Jai's artwork, these old Ancestors at the back of the exhibition, and essentially the objects and these people represented in the artworks have all been disenfranchised by this history and by collecting institutions such as ours.

Further to being classified in this way, these clubs are also listed with 'maker unknown'. Often the individual was disenfranchised in the collecting process and 'maker unknown' is one of the most common descriptions under 'Maker' in museum records. There have been previous exhibitions and work completed by other First Nations curators and people in the GLAM sector with this use of stating 'made by Ancestor'. We also now use that term because although we don't know who the maker is, we can at least respect and acknowledge that that maker is an Ancestor of people who are likely very much living today.



Figure 10: ‘Continued Resistance’ section of the *Unsettled* exhibition. Detail: *Keeper of the Law, Keeper of the Song, Keeper of the Dance*, 2014, by Jai Darby Walker (Bundjalung) and selection of wooden clubs made by Ancestors from the Australian Museum collection.

Source: James Alcock. © Jai Darby Walker; photograph from Australian Museum.

Exhibition Section Eight: Healing Nations

Laura

How do you end an exhibition like this, right? Australia has a heavy history. It’s a lived history for us and there’s a lot of emotions involved, but there needs to be some really positive outcomes that people think they can achieve.

Mariko

It’s about empowering people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to work together to consider how we can learn from this really difficult history and work towards a better present and a better shared future. It’s about birthing a new Australia, essentially.

Laura

That’s right. And in the lead-up to *Unsettled*, we had been running some deep listening workshops with Milan Dhiiyaan, a cultural company that operates out of central New South Wales. We found these incredibly valuable to our audiences. And we

thought if we could capture in some way that experience to end this exhibition on, we may be able to give people a space in which they can reflect but also take away some really important messages. And it was the community themselves, 68 Aboriginal people from different communities who worked with us on developing *Winhangadurinya*.

Mariko

So *Winhangadurinya* means ‘deep listening’, ‘reflecting’, ‘meditation’ in Wiradjuri language. And so this part of *Unsettled* really shows me how great it is to be a curator, how we can pull together something like this, but it didn’t happen in the museum space, we had to do this with community on Country, then bring it into the museum under their guidance.

Laura

We held women’s workshops with the female Elders, teaching us certain elements of culture, but also discussing the design of this space and what it would need to encompass. And the men then did the same as well.

Mariko

And everything had to be just right. The designs had to be accurate and appropriate. So working with the various Elders – the men and the women – but also even just collecting the materials, the wood itself, that was such a process as well, done with cultural permissions.

So where to now, Laura?

Laura

Well, I’m not sure it’s a ‘where to now’ question. I think that comes where people think that *Unsettled* was something at the beginning. Really, *Unsettled* is part of a larger disruption strategy that the First Nations staff have within the Australian Museum. Not disruption in a bad way, but if we don’t disrupt these systems within cultural institutions, then there will be no productive change.

We’re essentially trying to neutralise the museum space, because museums have never been neutral. So now that Aboriginal people have had a say on the Cook anniversary and the legacy of colonisation, I would like to see that we become much more self-determining across our natural history and science exhibitions. *Unsettled* is part of a larger journey and I’m just incredibly privileged that we were able to facilitate the voices and achieve discussion on those themes and topics that so many people in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community wanted from us. It’s an incredible

honour to be able to take part in this work when you know how many people before you have tried to achieve these same goals. So really we are just following in their footsteps and continuing work that started essentially in 1788.

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Book reviews

Artefacts, Archives and Documentation in the Relational Museum

by Mike Jones

192 pp., Routledge, 2022,
ISBN 9781003092704 (ebook), \$56.79

Review by Alison Clark
National Museums Scotland

Artefacts, Archives and Documentation in the Relational Museum is a testament to the author's vast experience in the GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives, and museums) sector. Jones writes that the book is 'inspired by these rich relationships between artefacts and archives' (p. 1). For anyone working in museums or researching museum collections, *Artefacts, Archives and Documentation in the Relational Museum* will be a familiar read. At a time when research projects are increasingly interdisciplinary and seek to bring together dispersed collections, this book could not be more relevant. The book provides a historical overview of United Kingdom, United States and Australian museum documentation processes focusing on the development of museums and collections management from the late 1700s until the present day through focused case studies. It considers the pros and cons of different documentation practices while providing practical suggestions for collections today. The breadth and depth of this book is outstanding, and Jones cleverly provides a detailed but not overly dense narrative that is accessible for a wide range of audiences.

The book is divided into five chapters plus an introduction and conclusion. The core argument throughout the book is the value of relational content management systems that make collections more accessible by enabling all information about a collection to be visible for all audiences. Outlining the historical development of UK museums such as the British Museum and the Ashmolean, continuing with a discussion of the Smithsonian's disciplinary divisions and how this has affected their catalogues, and drawing on additional examples from other UK and Australian institutions, Chapter 1 considers how the professionalisation of collections management has affected how we have, and continue to, engage with museum collections. Jones argues that the

separation of archives from other museum collections has contributed to a loss of knowledge about these collections and meant that connecting these collections in the present can be very difficult.

Rather than suggesting radical new approaches that seek to undo the work that has contributed to this loss, Jones argues that we need to move forward to reconnect 'artefacts and archives in ways that better reflect the complexities of knowledge' (p. 33). Chapters 2–5 seek to provide the ways in which museums can move forward using the collections of Museums Victoria as case studies to illustrate Jones's arguments. Following the catalogue history of a spring gun and a rifle at Museums Victoria, Chapter 2 looks at the move from analogue to digital documentation and the data loss that occurred during this process. Importantly Jones highlights an issue not limited to Museums Victoria where early moves to digital documentation that sought to make data more consistent often focused too heavily on what Jones terms 'inherent data' (data specifically linked to an object such as its material) rather than 'attributed data and narrative text' (contextual information) (p. 50). This meant that, while it was possible to physically identify an object, its social and cultural value was often lost.

Chapter 3 focuses on this contextual information to discuss field notes and the digital and physical management issues that surround them. Highlighting 'neglect as a non-physical agent' (p. 69) of change to collections, Jones makes a case for giving fieldnotes the same care as objects and specimens, recognising their value beyond just providing information about an object or specimen. Chapter 4 continues this argument by highlighting the social, political and cultural value of the fieldnotes within the Donald Thomson Collection at Museums Victoria alongside the photographs and artefacts that also comprise the collection. Using the example of a dugong rope, Jones discusses how the Thomson Collection has been documented over time and the different types of knowledge that are attached to this documentation. Jones also highlights the problems researchers and curators have had in accessing and linking up the various types of knowledge attached to the collection because of previous documentation practices. Describing the dugong rope, Jones writes:

more than just a functional tool for hunting or fishing, the artefact is entangled with language, myth, local animal species, and geographical features, as well as with Thomson's research and published output ... Today the rope sits in the Many Nations display, within First Peoples at the Melbourne Museum, accompanies by the story of Katterra and the discovery of the rope manufacturing process, a photograph of Thomson, and an image of a silver gull. Surrounded by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artefacts in a space shaped by community voices and consultation, the meaning of the dugong rope is now shaped by the aims of a contemporary relational museum. (p. 108)

He considers how relational documentation, while often visible in a museum display as shown in the quotation above, is often not explicit in the catalogue record and that by incorporating 'attributed data' such as 'indigenous perspectives' into documentation practices 'we can move away from the authoritative museum' (p. 104).

In Chapter 5 Jones provides some possible ways to move forward. He argues that museums should develop their documentation practices by drawing together cross-disciplinary models to reflect the ways in which 'people already understand and work with collections' (p. 126). In short, a model that is not based on silos but is about interconnection brings relationships to the fore and suits different users with different needs. Jones concludes by calling for the development of better tools for 'capturing and preserving diverse cultural knowledge, while retaining the systematic data required to support inventory and storage management, conservation and loans' (p. 138). Importantly, Jones is not suggesting that all institutions should adopt his suggestions in the same way but that responses should be bespoke to each institution and that the focus should be on recording all data and ensuring they remains linked.

While Jones draws heavily on museum and archive theory, the practical applications of this book are valuable and should be considered. As such the book is relevant not just to museum studies, anthropology, archaeology and information studies students and researchers but also to those working in museums, galleries and archives.

Too Much Cabbage and Jesus Christ: Australia's 'Mission Girl' Annie Lock

by Catherine Bishop

327 pp., Wakefield Press, 2021
ISBN: 9781743058572 (pbk), \$39.95

Review by Peggy Brock
Edith Cowan University

Catherine Bishop has done a prodigious amount of research over multiple archival and library collections tracking down the subject of this biography, Annie Lock, and her peripatetic life in South Australia, New South Wales, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. While Bishop has done a great job of tracing her life, the woman herself remains somewhat elusive. Annie Lock's life in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries is extraordinary and it is easy to understand Bishop's fascination with her.

Annie Lock was born into a large family in rural South Australia in 1876. Her parents had emigrated from England and worked hard to establish a life for themselves and their many children. Annie left school early with a truncated education and seems to have earned money as a dressmaker before moving to Adelaide at the age of 25 to undertake training as a missionary in a two-year course at Angas College, a non-denominational institution run on faith lines. The belief that one could rely on God to provide sustenance and support underpinned the rest of her life.

Annie Lock's missionary life took her first to New South Wales where she worked on three sites in quick succession at a time when the government policy was to remove children of mixed descent, 'half-castes', from their families and place them in homes. This was a policy that Lock endorsed for much of her life. Most Aboriginal children were barred by local non-Aboriginal residents from attending local state schools, so some Aboriginal communities such as the one at Forster wanted a missionary to set up a school for their children, which Lock did in the short time she spent with the community. In 1909 Lock moved to Western Australia, first to an orphanage in Perth, then two postings in the south-west before going north to Sunday Island off the Kimberley coast, where she stayed for five years – her longest stay on any mission.

This was her first encounter with Aboriginal people of full descent whose lifestyle and culture had not been devastated by colonial intrusion. Bishop suggests that Lock learned a lot from the missionary Montague Sydney Hadley, including the benefits of an isolated mission station, self-sufficiency and cultural negotiation.

Lock's next destination was Oodnadatta in northern South Australia where she went without informing the Australian Aborigines' Mission (AAM, UAM from 1929). Here she established what was to be a long-lived children's home, Colebrook Home. She then moved further north against explicit instructions from the mission society to Central Australia where she established herself in a number of localities, earning notoriety as one of the few people in the region who criticised the police over the mass killing of Aboriginal people known as the Coniston massacre, or Coniston killings as Bishop describes them. The last mission Lock set up was at Ooldea Soak a few miles north of the east–west railway line. Exhausted, Lock left Ooldea in 1936, too old and sick to begin all over again. She married in 1937 at the age of 60 and spent the last five years of her life with her husband living in a caravan and proselytising among the white population on Eyre Peninsula.

What a life, and what a job Bishop set herself tracing it. Most of the archival material Bishop found is Lock's reports and correspondence relating to her work. There were few personal letters or accounts, and while Bishop tried to track down Aboriginal people who knew Lock, she found few who, after all this time, had first-hand knowledge of Lock. Still, much can be inferred from the records that do exist and Bishop is careful to point out when she is speculating rather than relying on hard evidence.

The person Bishop traced was, in many ways, a person of her times with the racial prejudices and expectations of her era, but she was also a very eccentric person of her times, and over the years her experience of living in close contact with many Aboriginal communities did modify some of her views and behaviour. However, her belief in a God that would always provide never wavered, despite living what most people would regard as an impoverished existence with very little, if any, external support. Most of her working life was spent setting up missions and then leaving them within a few years. She would take Aboriginal children she considered neglected into her home (often nothing more than a tent or temporary structure) and treat them as foster children, mothering them in a kindly and loving manner, while ensuring they maintained the strict standards of cleanliness and behaviour she deemed necessary. But when she moved on to the next project she would leave them in a children's home or occasionally with another family. She would provide rations, cooked meals and medicines for those adults and families who joined her camps. She often set up schools to educate the children and nursed the sick, and, perhaps most importantly, offered a buffer between the Aboriginal people she gathered round her and the often hostile and predatory white society of the rural and outback areas in which she established herself.

Lock never attempted to learn any Aboriginal languages. After her five years on Sunday Island she did take more interest in Aboriginal cultural forms and values, although her prime focus as with other missionaries of the era was to proselytise and prepare people of mixed descent to join the lower echelons of colonial society. Despite her close association with many different Aboriginal societies, Lock did not regard Aboriginal people as equal to non-Aboriginal people, nor did she expect the education she offered would allow them to participate on an equal basis with the mainstream Australian society.

However one might judge her work, both against the values of her time and those of the present era, she was an extraordinary woman – courageous and self-reliant in going out on her own into regions remote from any support or assistance; strong willed; dogged in the most adverse conditions; skilled at making do with whatever was at hand, such as cooking for large numbers over an open fire and sewing clothes – maintaining order as she perceived it, and hardworking, until she became exhausted and unwell and had to retire from her calling for a few months every few years to recuperate and recharge while travelling to cities in the south to publicise her mission. Bishop finds she was regarded both as kindly and ‘lovely’ but also a crank and someone hard to get on with – a woman of contradictions, but a fascinating one.

Anti-Slavery and Australia: No Slavery in a Free Land?

by Jane Lydon

196 + xiv pp., Routledge, 2021
ISBN: 9780367740238 (pbk), \$62.39

Review by Zoë Laidlaw
University of Melbourne

A growing body of scholarship reveals the connections between chattel slavery and settler colonialism in Britain's nineteenth-century empire. Jane Lydon's important contribution to that work charts the profound impact of abolitionist activity and rhetoric on the colonisation of Australia. Lydon's expansive imperial framework reveals that Australian colonisation took place as – and indeed, in part, because – new forms of labour exploitation were replacing the chattel slavery so characteristic of early modern European imperialism. She also deploys an extended chronology: the book's focus is on Australia's colonial era, but Lydon's reflections on the legacies of anti-slavery for post-Federation Australia illuminate the complex interactions of race and labour through to the present day. *Anti-Slavery and Australia* offers both a nuanced historical analysis of Australian colonialism in its first 100 years and the perspective needed to reframe contemporary debates about the exploitation of labour in Australia.

Lydon rightly warns the reader against seeing 'enslavement' and 'freedom' as dichotomous: 'free' and 'unfree' labour lie on a continuum. Almost all the early nineteenth-century Britons who advocated passionately for the abolition of slavery were also committed to the moral and economic discipline of market capitalism; in the era of slave emancipation they saw the colonisation of Australia as closely bound to Britain's economic needs. This insight helps explain how grotesque inequalities between the formerly enslaved and their emancipators were not just tolerated but actively perpetuated, and why those inequalities reverberate today. It also cultivates a new perspective on Australian colonisation and its devastating consequences for Aboriginal peoples.

How does Lydon manage this and why does it matter to the readers of *Aboriginal History*? *Anti-Slavery and Australia* falls into several parts. The longest builds over five chapters from the 1770s to the ‘moment’ of emancipation in 1833: the point when – after 50 years of popular and parliamentary agitation, not to mention repeated and widespread resistance from enslaved people – Britain legislated to make chattel slavery illegal across most of its empire. Lydon’s analysis is most closely focused on ‘public political debate and the elite parliamentary-led anti-slavery movement’ (p. 6), but she demonstrates how these elites shaped the dispossession and inequality characteristic of Australian colonisation. Her case is based on a substantial body of textual sources, including parliamentary debates, government correspondence, court records, printed tracts and memoirs, but makes especially persuasive use of visual and material culture. A series of life stories illuminate how complex – and sometimes contradictory – ideas and arguments played out in practice in different colonies. Across the Australian continent and over the decades, the economic and ideological structures that Lydon dissects have most profoundly and obviously disadvantaged Aboriginal peoples, but she shows how their negative consequences extended to others without power, racial privilege or capital.

One of Lydon’s key contributions is her explanation of how British anti-slavery activists could oppose chattel slavery while endorsing – and even celebrating – other forms of economic unfreedom. The justifications elite Britons offered for their differing treatment of the British poor, Indigenous peoples and enslaved individuals shifted frequently between the 1780s and 1830s, but increasingly prioritised those racialised as ‘white’ over all others. As the rights of the British working class and the enslaved were brought into opposition, enslavement became coded as ‘black’.

In particular, Lydon examines the evangelical Christians who gave persistent voice to abolitionist arguments and provided the anti-slavery movement with its most prominent British leadership. Even as they positioned enslaved people as innocent victims of rapacious masters, abolitionist evangelicals developed a critique of Britain’s poor that blamed them for their situation. When Caribbean emancipation loomed, settler colonies were promoted as locations where capital could be invested and (first convict and then simply poor) white labour effectively regulated. Techniques and ideologies of control honed on Caribbean slave plantations were translated to southern Australia’s new colonies, while the theory of ‘systematic colonisation’ – the brainchild of Edward Gibbon Wakefield – promised to mitigate the economic risk emancipation posed for Britain’s elites. Lydon’s fifth chapter, which turns particularly to Tasmania and the early Port Phillip District, brings these complex threads together. It is here that Lydon draws out the connection between anti-slavery arguments and the theft of Indigenous land. The Aboriginal peoples of Australia were increasingly condemned – not least by those Britons committed to Indigenous protection – as idle, and in need of ‘discipline’ and ‘civilisation’; this racial othering expedited Aboriginal dispossession.

In two final chapters, Lydon surveys the later nineteenth century and turns to ‘modern slavery’. She demonstrates how Britain’s 1833 Emancipation Act – with its focus on chattel slavery – perversely contributed to labour exploitation across the empire. Indenture, convict labour, Indigenous dispossession and restrictions on who could access land, all served to secure and control non-white labour forces. These mechanisms’ divergences from chattel slavery were emphasised; their equally important similarities were ignored. In Australia, simplistic anti-slavery characterisations of enslavement paved the way for Western Australia’s late-nineteenth-century use of chains and corporal punishment for Aboriginal prisoners, and shaped debates about South Sea Islanders in Queensland. Lydon’s stark and affecting final chapter argues that we must understand this complicated history – and eschew the generalisations inherent in the tag of ‘modern slavery’ – in order to combat contemporary human trafficking and the ongoing discrimination faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Her compelling study reveals profound problems of our time as products of their deep historical context.

Gudyarra: The First Wiradyuri War of Resistance: The Bathurst War, 1822–1824

by Stephen Gapps

288 pp., NewSouth Publishing, 2021
ISBN: 9781742236711 (pbk), \$34.99

Review by Carol Liston
Western Sydney University

In August 1824 the governor of New South Wales, Sir Thomas Brisbane, signed a proclamation declaring martial law west of Mount York in the Blue Mountains. In the 26 years since the British had arrived and established a convict colony with a military presence, this was the first time military rule officially replaced civil authority. The threat that triggered this unique response was violence between black and white in the new country over the mountains.

This incident is not the beginning of Gapps's powerful account. That it falls about two-thirds into the book indicates that much of the work is about how this situation arose. This represents a continuum from the incidents and confrontations in the County of Cumberland on which Gapps's earlier book, *The Sydney Wars*, was based. With the crossing of the Blue Mountains, construction of the road over the mountains and the establishment of Bathurst, European visits intensified. The number of sheep and cattle that grazed there within a few years is astounding. The first invaders were not people but animals. The intensity of European occupation was increased by Governor Brisbane's preference for tickets of occupation over grants. This forerunner to squatting enabled colonists to send large numbers of stock to nominated districts under the supervision of stockmen, often assigned convicts or ticket-of-leave men.

While using historical sources that have been well known for a century in *Historical Records of Australia* as the basis, Gapps has brought to this account new sources that significantly alter the interpretation of the traditional accounts. Official returns from the archives add details, but it is the personal accounts that provide the substance, confirmation of the 'whispered accounts' of violence. The collections of local historical societies are generally under-utilised but Gapps has found among the family memoirs

unambiguous accounts of participation in a frontier war. This was an age of war; many of the colonists had experienced the Napoleonic wars and, though no longer in the military, they recounted battle action without self-censorship.

New sources include the evidence of the Wiradyuri people, past and present. Their Elders and descendants have shared with Gapps their knowledge of Country and customs and enabled him to reinterpret European accounts. This dramatically changes an account of a massacre near the Cudgegong River in September 1824 into a battlefield scenario where a well-armed war party under the Wiradyuri leader known as 'Blucher' engaged the Cox family's convict overseer and stockmen. Understanding topography and custom and questioning the use of weapons in a running battle, Gapps completely revises our perception of this incident.

Windradyne (known as Saturday to the colonists) was the best known of the Wiradyuri leaders but Gapps details how the various bands under a number of leaders were able to surround the Bathurst area and carry out raids on stock outstations. From Mudgee in the north to Blayney in the south-west and Oberon in the south-east, the Wiradyuri conducted so many attacks that the assigned convict servants were unwilling to remain on the isolated outstations and retreated from a number of locations, including abandoning government stock stations. For pastoralists seeking more grazing land, this retreat had to be stopped.

Martial law implies the use of military force. Gapps discusses the military forces available in the colony. Despite requests from both Macquarie and Brisbane, the military were few in number and stretched thin across the colony. Martial law west of the mountains saw the arming of civilians including convict workers at outstations. The absence of official reports of armed actions suggests that many of the incidents from August 1824 until the end of the year were undertaken by the pastoralists and their workforce and were not reported. The authorities in Sydney were seemingly unaware of much that was going on at the frontier. Brisbane's administration was also wracked by internal dissent, further limiting its efficiency.

There are uncomfortable truths to be faced by readers of this work. By using sources from below, family accounts (even those written decades later) provide evidence that has been missing from the official records. While self-interest was undoubtedly dominant in the minds of all colonists, they had differing sympathies and understandings about the Indigenous people with whom they came in contact. In this account, Gapps has moved beyond generic accounts of the anonymous 'colonists' and named people, places and incidents, not only those in authority but those on the ground, including workers. Convict shepherds killed in incidents or fleeing to safety are named, as are the pastoralists who responded to the attacks. His work now demands revision of the activities of well-known colonial families.

Most chapters are introduced with hand-drawn maps. Wiradyuri and European names are included and pictograms indicate the location and character of incidents, whether raids on stock or property, armed skirmishes or killings of either Wiradyuri or colonists. More detailed maps of some of the incidents would be useful for readers, as would illustrations of the country as the action moves from open grazing lands to valleys and rougher terrain, environments in which the Wiradyuri had the advantage.

Despite the numerous actions by the Wiradyuri, Gapps calculates that they lost about 10 per cent of their warriors. Peace was now essential for survival. At a gathering of Aboriginal groups at Parramatta in December 1824, Windradyne led 140 Wiradyuri over the mountains to meet the governor.

Resistance did not end with the lifting of martial law at the end of 1824. Nor did the violence. The weapons remained in the hands of the rural workforce and Gapps suggests that one consequence was the outbreak of bushranging that followed later in the 1820s.

Debesa: The Story of Frank and Katie Rodriguez

by Cindy Solonec

288 pp., Magabala Books, 2021
ISBN: 9781925936001 (pbk), \$25.00

Review by Ann McGrath
The Australian National University

Debesa is an inspiring and wondrous Australian story – arguably family history at its best. Based firmly in region, it takes place in the world of the West Kimberley, on the sheep and cattle stations around Derby. It is also a global story. We meet the seafaring Indian great-grandfather who sailed into Fremantle in the 1880s, then promptly jumped ship. We learn how he met the beautiful Nigena woman, Muninga. The narrative evolves to become a transgenerational story of interconnected Indian, Spanish, European and Nigena families.

Cindy Solonec had a Nigena mother and a Spanish father proud of his Galician traditions. They travel between worlds. Cindy's father came out to Australia to be trained in the priesthood at the Spanish Benedictine mission. Both remained devout Catholics, and the author credits their cherished religious values for helping to create their loving and stable family life.

Debesa's first chapter opens with a horror story from the earlier generation. In 1909, when working for the Chinese shop-owner Quang Sing, Muninga and another relation had their children stolen by police. They tricked the young children to get onto a cart, then took them to a cold cell in Derby where they were locked up for the night. Little Gypsy was still being breastfed so had to be comforted by the young Jira, Cindy's grannie. They were then transported on the SS *Koombana*, a luxury ship operated by the Adelaide Steamship Company, to be transported to Beagle Bay Mission. They were below deck and understandably terrified. The preceding dislocations of sovereign Indigenous peoples from their lands, heightened by this horrible ordeal of state-endorsed kidnapping, of family rupture and loss, inform the first chapter, which is aptly entitled 'Removed'. No matter how many times such stories are told and heard, the inhumanity that made these actions possible cannot be expunged from the nation's story.

From this point on, however, the narrative is primarily a triumph of family love. It details richly textured lives of hard work and success. Occasionally racism flickers into the picture, but it is incidental to where the heart of this book lies. And that rests in its wonderful tribute to Solonec's father and mother. The author has benefited from access to her father's diaries, written in Castilian and English, which he helpfully worked through during her research for her doctorate. As Solonec points out, this provided a chronology, though she also notes the diary's omission of important events when times were especially tough. Solonec's account benefits further from a storehouse of family knowledge and additional interviews. It is informed by meticulous historical research, including an excellent survey of existing academic and popular literature and archival sources.

Through her richly textured descriptions of place, and by sharing vivid details of everyday activities, Solonec reveals a talent for rendering events multi-sensory and multi-dimensional, with a freshness that makes them memorable. The writing style is easy to follow; it is conversational, and fortunately the editors at Magabala do not restrict the occasional use of informal grammar and non-standard English such as *countrimin*. The text is also assisted by a glossary at the end of the book. Solonec's knowledge of the various Indigenous nations, and of relevant Indigenous terminology, lends an authority to the narrative. Admittedly the reader will sometimes have to flip back and forth to recall who's who among the various interconnected families and friends and exactly where they are located at particular times. The occasional family tree diagram assists.

At one point, Solonec says the children of her family felt Spanish; indeed, their father's heritage was a strong point of difference from wider community members. Yet he always respected Nigena knowledge and, despite her mission upbringing, her mother always knew where she came from, later continuing to revive family relationships with her kin. We learn how Solonec's siblings benefited from Nigena bush knowledge and kinship – helpful attributes for pastoral work. Their parents were practical people, with an impressive range of skills and expertise in everything they attempted. They prioritised independence, investing a huge amount of time, energy and emotion into their property and sheep enterprise, Debesa. It is clear they made a wonderful home for their children there. They also insisted on providing opportunities for their future, investing in a boarding school education and moral lessons.

Reading this book made me wonder why historians ever thought family history was delimited to amateurs or somehow innately unimportant, which was in fact still the case when I was teaching Australian history in the 1980s. Solonec's prose effortlessly integrates oral history insights with those from a wide range of other sources, contextualising the story of her family in a sophisticated opus. Indigenous authors like the pioneering historian Jackie Huggins have ensured that family history has become a key means for the wider Australian community to learn about Aboriginal history, of her people's entwined relationships and resilience. Like all histories, Aboriginal history is family history too. And without books like *Debesa*, we cannot really know the breadth of Australian history.

The Bible in Buffalo Country: Oenpelli Mission 1925–1931

by Sally K. May, Laura Rademaker, Donna Nadjamerrek
and Julie Narndal Gumurdul

311 pp., ANU Press, 2020
ISBN: 9781760463984 (pbk)

Review by Bronwyn Shepherd
Deakin University

The Bible in Buffalo Country is primarily a publication of the large amount of correspondence produced by the early missionaries at Oenpelli mission between 1925 and 1931. This work opens with a note by Julie Narndal Gumurdul who, through her own familial connections with the Oenpelli mission, speaks to the complicated relationships shaping the community that remains today on Mandjurlingunj land. Despite the challenges that often accompany reading records produced about them, Gumurdul asserts the value of such a collection for ‘bringing back many memories’ to the many descendants today whose lives have been entangled with the history of Oenpelli mission – a history of ‘dynamic innovation and adaption’ (p. 20) while also continuing their foundational connectedness to tradition and identity.

The collection of mission documents that forms the largest part of this book are from the Church Mission Society (CMS) archives held at the Mitchell Library. They comprise letters and station reports written from the Oenpelli mission during the opening years of the mission (1925–31). With some helpful clarifications added, these records have largely been reproduced as they were written. The seeming monotone of the dominant missionary’s voice is interspersed with many of the photographs taken at the mission during this same period. Mainly produced by Alfred and Mary Dyer, these records reflect their view from the ground during the mission’s formative years. These mission documents are strategically encased between contextualising chapters that help reframe the lens of the reader to ‘see within’ the record and notice ways that Aboriginal peoples were always present and finding ways to engage with the newcomers.

The first chapter sheds light on the gap between missionary intent and their capacity to deliver their vision for the Bininj people of the region. This is methodologically significant for reading missionary accounts generated by a belief in their own capacity to know what Aboriginal people needed. In reality, the rollout of such a concise agenda was not so straightforward. Missionaries arrived on Mandjurlngunj land, where the Bininj people were well accustomed to dealing with visitors and negotiating in intercultural spaces (Chapter 2).

As the authors of this book highlight, the missionaries ‘began on the back foot’, having to navigate complex Bininj kinship networks and connections as well as dealing with previous settler impacts in the region – from the buffalo encroachment to the troubling Cahill era (Chapter 3). In all this, Bininj were present ‘working hard to make the most of a difficult situation for their community’. Rather than a simple roll out of their agenda, the missionaries who arrived to set up the mission in 1925 needed to negotiate with Bininj to establish some common and tradable ground.

Likewise, the missionaries who arrived at Oenpelli were also part of a larger story of missionary practice entangled with colonial purpose. Chapter 4 grounds the ambitions and agendas of the CMS – the Anglican missionary society responsible for establishing the mission at Oenpelli – within the unfolding colonial story.

These historical details help quarantine the missionary’s words, sense of purpose and capacity to fulfil the expectations of their sending organisation. Framed through their correspondence with a faraway audience, notions of their missionary work articulated through the enormous number of personal letters, station reports and fundraising helped to reify their rigid gaze and gendered norms. Such expectations attached to the work of the missionary overlooked their personal capacity to survive and adapt to their new surroundings, on someone else’s land and isolated from their own families and culture.

Notwithstanding the human experience behind these mission documents, they are intense to read and unrelenting in their conversations about, not with, the Bininj people. What I am most interested in reading in the accounts by the Dyers is that they appear so consumed by the routine of correspondence with the outside world rather than with establishing connections with the place and people. Consequently, their record effectively diminishes the participation of other people in these same encounters and obscures the view of those who in some instances were a significant support for these missionaries who were finding their feet in an unfamiliar place. Considering the various ways that Bininj interacted with missionaries, a nagging question lingers about how the missionaries at Oenpelli continued to believe the best way to educate their children was to separate them from their families, languages and culture.

Careful consideration, then, of the material contained within these mission documents is vital for the insights they reveal about the intercultural spaces that were formed and sustained over time. Within these records are names, reflections, events and ideas earnestly scribed in time to be sent off with the next boat. They hold important details about the developing networks both within the mission and with other nearby missions. They also contain many names of Aboriginal people, which have been collated and listed in the appendix.

Even so, these mission documents have limited capacity to reflect the different ways and reasons that people connected with and attached meaning to the place that was known as Oenpelli mission. As Gumurdul and Manakgu show, the memory of the mission days carries profound import for descendants, whose lives were and continue to be entangled with the story of Oenpelli. This book fittingly concludes with insights by Ester Manakgu about her memories of growing up on the mission at Oenpelli. These memories put flesh on the bones of details contained within the mission record, which reflect the Bininj experience of engaging both with the mission routines and expectations while continuing the cultural and familial connections to the place. Well placed to conclude the contextualisation of the mission documents, the stories told by Esther situate Oenpelli within the larger story of the Bininj people and Gunbalanya – their place.

Governing Natives: Indirect Rule and Settler Colonialism in Australia's North

by Ben Silverstein

ix + 217 pp., Manchester University Press, 2018,
ISBN: 9781784995263 (hbk), £85.00

Review by Samuel Furphy
The Australian National University

Ben Silverstein's *Governing Natives: Indirect Rule and Settler Colonialism in Australia's North* is a deeply researched, theoretically sophisticated and highly readable book, which makes the new and compelling argument that the Aboriginal New Deal, a major reform of Commonwealth policy in the Northern Territory in 1939, can be interpreted as a form of 'indirect rule'. The book opens with an account of the death in 1937 of a Pintubi man at a pastoral station on the Ormiston River in Central Australia during an intra-tribal argument. This event prompted a visiting patrol officer, Ted Strehlow, to ponder what he should do when (as Silverstein puts it) 'Aboriginal people had acted as though unconcerned by the spectre of his authority' (p. 1). Strehlow was unsure as to whether any of those involved should be charged and tried; the applicability of settler law was at least questionable. The case highlighted the problems of physical and jurisdictional coexistence; of Aboriginal people who were essentially self-governing and were also choosing to move through settler spaces around pastoral stations.

This recognition by the anthropologically trained Strehlow, of the workings of Indigenous law and sovereignty, presented a series of dilemmas that are the subject of Silverstein's book. The author considers how, during a series of crises in the Northern Territory in the 1930s, the Commonwealth authorities decided the best solution was to incorporate 'the political rationality of indirect rule into the practice of government in Australia' (p. 6).

After an introductory chapter, Silverstein proceeds in Chapter 2 to chart a genealogy of indirect rule, a trend in imperialism that spanned the British Empire. Emerging in the wake of the 1857 Indian Rebellion, it was notably expressed in Fiji, refined in Nigeria, and codified by the first governor general of that colony, Frederick Lugard,

in a book published in 1922. Reaching its apogee of influence in the interwar period, indirect rule involved governing through rather than in opposition to Indigenous hierarchies, aiming 'to expand the productive capacities of native societies and appropriate the surplus' (p. 33).

In Chapters 3–5, Silverstein charts three distinct crises that enveloped the administration of the Northern Territory in the 1930s. The first was an economic crisis within a pastoral industry that depended on Aboriginal labour, but in exploitative conditions that made the survival of that labour force uncertain. The second was a crisis of law – of how to deal with sometimes violent expressions of Indigenous sovereignty. It found its initial solution through the expertise of anthropology, and notably the work of Donald Thompson in Arnhem Land. The third crisis was one of protest, with both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people beginning to question the legitimacy of the regime in the Territory overseen by the chief protector, Cecil Cook.

These crises converged in 1938 in the office of the newly appointed minister for internal affairs, John McEwen, who found on his desk reports on both the travails of the pastoral industry and on Thompson's inquiries in Arnhem Land. He also received deputations from activists, who were especially active in 1938. Strongly influenced by the anthropologist A. P. Elkin, McEwen developed a new policy that attempted to reconcile these various challenges, and that articulated closely with his aim of northern economic development. This complementary relationship between Aboriginal administration and economic development, through a pastoral industry supported by government investment, leads to Silverstein's interpretation of the Aboriginal New Deal as a form of indirect rule.

Chapters 6 and 7 describe the new policy. Chapter 6 focuses on Aboriginal reserves, which Silverstein argues were intended to promote civilisation and assimilation, but on a slow, even asymptotic, time scale. Crucially, these reserves were to be governed indirectly, using anthropologically trained officers who understood the subtle structures of Aboriginal social organisation. Chapter 7 considers how the long march to civilisation for Aboriginal people would be driven by participation in new types of labour: work was 'transformative, the mechanism of progress' (p. 161). The chapter considers practices such as rationing and the seasonal walkabout, which are interpreted through the logic of indirect rule.

Silverstein's book makes a significant contribution to the theoretical literature on settler colonialism. He avoids adopting the sharp distinction of the theorist Lorenzo Veracini that 'settler colonialism is not colonialism' (p. 6), but acknowledges his intellectual debt to another pioneer of settler colonial studies, Patrick Wolfe, a supervisor of the doctoral thesis upon which the book is based. Wolfe contrasted settler colonial Australia, where the colonial imperative was typically to eliminate Indigenous people from the land, to franchise colonies elsewhere in the empire, where the extraction of Indigenous labour was the *modus operandi*. Silverstein insists, however, that it is not enough to distinguish Australia from colonies like Nigeria, and that scholars must

also recognise regional variation within Australia: 'the Ormiston River (NT) was not Melbourne' (p. 7). His purpose is to 'trace gradations across a dynamic and unified empire' (p. 7), and he does this through the lens of indirect rule, 'a political mentality ... that was articulated distinctly in each contingent space' (p. 8).

In exploring both the strengths and limits of settler colonial theory, Silverstein is on fertile ground in the Northern Territory, where elimination and integration coexisted in messy ways – where the urge to clear the land and create a White Australia was complicated by the need to exploit Indigenous labour in a fragile pastoral economy. The New Deal was a short-lived policy, with the advent of the Second World War soon transforming the Northern Territory in profound ways; but, as Silverstein's rich and rewarding book demonstrates, it is well worth detailed consideration, as it occurred at a pivotal moment in Australian race relations.

Redfern: Aboriginal Activism in the 1970s

by Johanna Perheentupa

xii + 244 pp., Aboriginal Studies Press, 2020,
ISBN: 9781925302295 (pbk), \$39.95

Review by Heather Goodall
University of Technology Sydney

This is a valuable, carefully researched and engaging book that offers thoughtful insights into an important period in Aboriginal and wider Australian politics. The 1970s saw heated activity and many changes in the diverse settings of Aboriginal politics across the continent, including the varied areas of a large city like Sydney, so it is not surprising that this book cannot consider them all. The young activists in Redfern in the 1970s saw themselves as leading events right across the country, assuming a 'pan-Aboriginality' in which they felt comfortable speaking for others. Their self-assessment was inflated but nevertheless, as Perheentupa demonstrates, there were innovative and creative developments taking place in Redfern as Aboriginal people grappled with very new circumstances.

Yet there had been many Aboriginal people living across Sydney since the invasion began, as Denis Foley, Peter Read, Leanne Mulgo Watson and Grace Karskens, Heidi Norman and many others have demonstrated.¹ The Redfern activists seemed at times to be unaware of this continuing Aboriginal population and at other times dismissive, as Perheentupa acknowledges.

This book is particularly important because it looks carefully at the development of various self-help organisations in Redfern over the 1970s that had significant differences in operation, structure and alliances, despite at times sharing personnel and rhetoric. These activists, having had better access to formal education than earlier generations, had each come to Sydney seeking further training, ranging from apprenticeships to law degrees. This allowed them to meet and recruit as allies the rising numbers of activist students who were looking for approaches to

¹ Foley, *Repossession*; Foley and Read, *What the Colonists Never Knew*; Read and Sukovic, 'Pieces of a Thousand Stories'; Norman, 'Aboriginal Redfern'; Karskens et al., 'Real Secret River'.

counter the inequalities they were identifying themselves. As well, however, their strategies also drew on approaches emerging internationally, particularly in the cities of the United States, where African-American activists were setting up self-help organisations to challenge the legal and utility discrimination they faced, often recognisable to Aboriginal eyes. To point out such similarities, the Redfern activists effectively mobilised the terms and icons of the Black Panther movement, but their most practical borrowing was the concept of self-help organisations. The strategies they tried out in Redfern were useful models – of both what might work but also what might not work! – for other Aboriginal groups as they tried to plan strategic approaches to the conditions they faced in varying circumstances across the country. Such strategies suited the times; there were interested, radical non-Indigenous students who were looking for anti-racist campaigns to support, and at the same time, there were governments – both conservative and labour – interested in funding self-help programs that would fill glaring gaps in service delivery, but with the expectation that such fast-track ‘self-management’ would lead to an equality that allowed the special services to disappear.

The book explores the way the self-help organisations set up in the 1970s took different approaches to asserting Aboriginal control and to dealing with the interference of government funders. Some of these differences related to different leadership affiliations – a number of the key organisations were controlled by people from Wiradjuri areas, often from Cowra and closely related to the Coe family.

Others were more closely associated with people from coastal areas, notably the northern coast Bandjalang, Gumbayngirr and Dhang-gati groups but also south coastal Yuin and Jerrinja people. More important for Perheentupa’s analysis, however, is the question of the service delivered. She argues that the Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS), in organising lawyers and legal advice, was delivering a service for which there was no alternative – there had been no community legal aid or public defenders structures set up at that time – so the ALS had greater bargaining power to defy the intrusive accounting and reporting demands of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. The Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS), on the other hand, was mobilising resources around health care, with an extensive public health system already established, giving the AMS less bargaining power. The outcome was a difference in the structures of management, with no non-Aboriginal people on the ALS board – professional or otherwise – whereas the AMS always had non-Indigenous people in board positions and worked on a more collaborative process of policy development.

Gender was another significant variable among organisations. In those organisations seen as relating particularly to women – namely the AMS and Murawina Childcare service – there were far more female workers and board members. Both these organisations also utilised a less confrontational approach to government although

maintaining the importance of self-determination and cultural independence. Notably, this difference mirrored dominant gender roles and – it could be argued – the masculine dominance of the Redfern activist group in general.

Among the organisations examined, Black Theatre was in many ways least like the others, although a number of the leaders in other organisations took roles in Black Theatre productions. Led (at least some of the time) by a woman, it had strong New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation (BLF) support yet was the least hetero-normative and least confrontational of all of them. Furthermore, it operated as the least sectarian, offering a more comfortable, welcoming meeting place for people from diverse affiliations and organisations than any other Aboriginal-controlled organisational space in Redfern. Yet Black Theatre struggled with the federal and state governments' disinterest in supporting any type of cultural organisations, even during the Whitlam Labor years. As well, it suffered from divisions among its participants over what areas of the arts to be supported and how best to offer spaces and facilities for that support. The absence of a substantive property in Redfern was evident for this organisation – it simply had no safe space.

It is not surprising that the organisation that experienced most non-Indigenous resistance was the Aboriginal Housing Company, also with strong BLF support, and which was funded to purchase significant areas of land in the gentrifying suburb. Perheentupa offers yet another careful and valuable analysis of the complex politics and challenges of this organisation as it tried to chart a course between the hostility of local whites and the tensions among Redfern activists.

Heidi Norman has argued persuasively in the case of Land Councils that conflict with government nevertheless led to increased 'legibility' in Aboriginal organisations, allowing effective management by governments, despite the rising and determined resistance of activists to such interference.² Nevertheless, these Redfern organisations and others like them did allow a platform for Aboriginal leaders to speak back to demands that they conform to government controls. In the lessons learned as Aboriginal people in other areas observed the conflictual interactions in Redfern – both within the organisations and with government – the wave of innovation and creativity arguably passed to those organisations outside Sydney that distanced themselves from Redfern in later years. Perhaps the most lasting achievement of the Redfern activists, despite – or perhaps because – their approaches were abrasive and at times counterproductive, was to challenge 'cultural erasure'. As Perheentupa argues:

Their location in Redfern and in the everyday lives of local Aboriginal people underlined their belonging in a settler-colonial city which, in non-Indigenous minds, had been discursively emptied of Indigenous presence. (p. 182)

2 Norman, 'What Do We Want?'

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