



Asserting Indigenous Agencies: Constructions and Deconstructions of James Cook in Northern Queensland

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Who among those who saw the sails disappear northwards after the crew of the Endeavour has finished repairing their vessel would have thought that four generations later, the captain's descendants would return with such vengeance, with a fever for gold and for land, leaving demoralised strugglers begging, sneaking and apologising for an existence in their own country? Noel Pearson (2011, p. 31)

INTRODUCTION

Amplified by Black Lives Matter (BLM), questions over whether Australis's colonial past and present should be celebrated through public monuments, statues, place names, and re-enactments have provoked debate amongst a broad section of the community. Public views towards the existence of colonial monuments within settler-colonial spaces vary between and among Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, with responses not always aligning with commonly held preconceptions of the government of the day. Arguments for the continued existence of monuments within public spaces are often based on the notion that they are valuable archives of Australian history and should

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therefore be recognised and celebrated as such. In some cases, monuments have encouraged constructive agonistic dialogue through which Australia's contested and violent past is confronted and unpacked. In others, they have provoked antagonistic responses that have resulted in violence, destruction, vandalism and, in some cases, their forced or agreed removal.

In this chapter, we consider how colonial monuments in Cairns and Cooktown, situated in North Queensland, Australia, maintain white hegemonic discourses of colonisation where coloniality is envisioned as 'progress' and 'modernity'. We discuss how monuments, statues and re-enactments function as sites of colonial resistance. Through their contextualisation, monuments reveal unstable terrains that "problematize[s] not only hegemony and domination but *resistance* as well" (Oakes, 1997, p. 252). For some Aboriginal people in Cooktown, resistance comes not from outright opposition to colonial narratives, but rather through repositioning figures such as Captain James Cook within Indigenous perspectives that emphasises Aboriginal agency and sovereignty.

CONTESTED PLACE

Statues and monuments of Cook and other colonial figures provoke widespread discussion over Australia's colonial history. Yet, through their decontextualisation, they overwhelmingly present selective, monovocal accounts of history that are removed from the contested and pluralistic contexts in which they are embedded (Fredericks, 2020; Moreton-Robinson, 2007). Margaret Somerville (2010, p. 330), Professor of Education at the University of Western Sydney, has written that "Australian scholars and researchers cannot begin to articulate a position about place without confronting the complex political realities of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships in place". Professor Bronwyn Fredericks (2020, para. 9), Aboriginal scholar and pro-vice-chancellor (Indigenous engagement) at the University of Queensland, explains that such complexities arise predominantly "because of the dispossession of Aboriginal people".

Through their interactions with the monuments that attempt to shape and communicate the meaning of place in Australia, Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists are exemplifying place as contested, fluid, unstable, multi-vocal and existing within an interface or border-zone (Bhabha, 2012; Gupta & Ferguson, 2008; Mignolo, 2002; Oakes, 1997). As locations where Cook made 'first contact' with Indigenous people, coastal shores and beaches are such border zones on which colonial narratives, re-enactments and monuments are often placed (Moreton-Robinson, 2015a). Like many places situated in settler-colonial environments, the beach has entered the Australian imagination as inclusive, yet it is one that remains predominantly white, exclusive and alienating to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Moreton-Robinson, 2015a; Moreton-Robinson & Nicol, 2006).

Much of what is written about Cook's encounters along the east coast of the Australian continent comes from his and Joseph Banks' diary entries, which were sent to the Admiralty in London in October 1770 (National Museum Australia, 2021a). While a primary source that provides rich historic accounts relevant to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, the diaries' narrative is nonetheless situated within a European/colonial perspective and agenda that seeks to document interactions with the so-called Other and provide a written account that accompanied the expansion of the British Empire. History, and the national discourses that accompany it, are never singular but rather understood in relation to local contexts and diverse interactions with and within place. In Australia, the local context must include the accounts, testimonies and oral histories of Indigenous peoples. Monuments celebrating Cook are dependent on Aboriginal knowledge, such as the 1822 memorial plaque at Kurnell, Sydney, which depended on Indigenous oral histories to identify the location of Cook's arrival to memorialise that place (Healy, 1997). This demonstrates some willingness to understand knowledge of Cook from an Aboriginal perspective but only in relation to the dominant culture and for the purpose of filling a knowledge gap. There is no acknowledgement of the source of information. Professor of Human Geography at Oxford University, Linda McDowell (1999, p. 4) observes that it is "socio-spatial practices [that] define places and these practices result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion". Cook's encounters during his voyage southward were equally informed by Aboriginal peoples and the places where lived experiences overlapped and intersected. Monuments and re-enactments function as indexes of such intersections, reflecting power-dynamics and resulting in diverse readings that shape the meanings of place, how it presented within the nation imagination and who it excludes (Anderson, 2006).

Writing on monument buildings as reflections of membership, and therefore places of inclusion and exclusion, French philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1991, p. 116) observes how the "analysis of any space brings us up against the dialectical relationship between demand and command, along with its attendant questions: 'Who?', 'For whom?', 'By whose agency?', 'Why?' and 'how?'" (see also Bruner, 2004). While monuments function as indexes of history, they are always socially constructed representations targeted towards specific 'members' (Babidge, 2015; Carlson & Farrelly, 2022a, 2022b). They exist within a political ecology that "is the product of all the hard work of observers, opinion-makers, teachers, writers, artists of various sorts, archivists and the builders of monuments, museums, texts, databases and commemorative events" (Muecke, 2008, p. 34).

As metaphors for Indigenous/settler relations, narratives of Cook are diverse and vary in accordance with spatialised colonial histories and encounters (Hokari, 2011). In some Indigenous accounts, Cook represents an oppressive invading regime, while in others he is presented as a figure whose 'abilities' and introduction of new technologies provided new ways of apprehending and

interacting with the world. Regardless, Cook is always situated within a time and place that is relevant to local communities and language groups, providing a means of narrating colonial relationships and the political economy (Rose, 2001).

For the Gurindji people, whose country lies in Northern Central Australia, some oral histories account for how Cook travelled from Sydney to the Northern Territory bringing with him the ‘Book’ [European law] that was imposed on Aboriginal people. From Gurindji perspectives, Cook’s law lacked legitimacy, morality and authority as he was separated from Gurindji Country and Dreaming, and therefore brought the ‘wrong way’ (Rose, 1992). In contrast, Rembarrnga artist, Paddy Fordham Wainburranga, describes Cook as belonging to the Yirritja, one of the two moiety groups of the Yirrkala community in North-East Arnhem Land, who, like ancestral beings, faced numerous challenges. In one account, Cook battled Satan, shaping country with modern infrastructure such as the Sydney Harbour Tunnel. Cook brought new technologies that were seen to ultimately benefit Yirritja people (Neale, 2008). Embedded in storytelling, Indigenous histories enable a subjective agency that allow those who tell them to address parts of the narrative most relevant to their time, place and purpose. Histories, however, should not be seen as universal, but they are not singular and nor do they belong to one individual.

Monuments and re-enactments are never literal presentations of the past, but rather form part of a performative ‘world-making’ process (Bruner, 2004), told through narratives imbued with memory, experience and imaginings relevant to the temporal moment. Professor of Culture and Communication at Melbourne University, Chris Healy (1997, p. 26) writes how monuments are “spaces where the possibilities between history and memory can be acted out, spaces that denote sites of history and can connote environments of memory”. Through their (re)telling, historical narratives reflect how one negotiates, apprehends and wishes to view and be viewed in the world. Monuments of Cook provoke conflicting narratives that both celebrate white colonial nation-building—predominantly through silencing Indigenous agency, voices and sovereignty—and, as will be considered through the case study of colonial re-enactments in Cooktown, provide an outlet through which Cook’s encounters are juxtaposed with narratives of Indigenous leadership, diplomacy and resistance. Through monuments, the paradoxical nature of place and conflicting narratives intersect, reflecting diverse lived experiences that contest the notion that “borderlands are just such a place of incommensurable contradictions” (Gupta & Ferguson, 2008, p. 18).

In agreement with Timothy Oakes (1997, p. 509), Professor of Geography at the University of Colorado, we concur that “place can be associated with a new spatial politics of resistance, an effort to reinscribe a place-based territorial identity in opposition to the spatial colonizations of capitalist modernity”. Colonial monuments and re-enactments both resist and maintain a white modernity at the exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Our aim, in this chapter, is not to provide an objective analysis of ‘cancel culture’ or

debate whether colonial monuments should remain in the twenty-first century but to emphasise the complexities and paradoxes of colonisation, which must be confronted and unpacked as part of an ongoing pursuit.

PLACE AS SOCIALLY ORGANISED

Indigenous people, particularly in urban Australia (Fredericks, 2013), are often imagined within white hegemonic discourses as the passive and disempowered victims of colonial dispossession. Urban settings vis-a-vis regional and remote locations are commonly envisioned as abnormal spaces or anomalies (Fredericks, 2020) in which Indigenous people are seen not to belong ‘naturally’ (Behrendt, 1995; Fredericks, 2004). National discourses in Australia overwhelmingly fail to acknowledge that such urban spaces—and the architecture, people, institutions, town planning and landscaping within them—remain on Indigenous country. Fredericks (2020), for example, has written about how some universities can act as monuments of European knowledge and dominance, reshaping the landscape by normalising European occupation while maintaining myths of *terra nullius* (see also Butler, 2000). She argues that this ultimately positions Aboriginal people as anomalies where they either remain within the background (as footnotes to dominant colonial narratives) or are excluded altogether.

For many Indigenous people, monuments contribute to whether a space—be it university, hospital, park or the broader landscape—is deemed welcoming, safe or threatening. The ways in which space is organised symbolises and communicates whose authority takes precedence, whose voices are prioritised and what narratives are deemed legitimate or important (Carlson & Farrelly, 2022a, 2022b). This can significantly impact how spaces are used, or whether services are accessed or avoided (Fredericks, 2009b). For example, a study found that placing artwork depicting colonial landscapes at the waiting area of a health centre in Rockhampton, Queensland, increased feelings of discomfort, distrust and alienation among Aboriginal patients and visitors (Fredericks, 2009b). Fredericks (2009b, p. 33) observes that for many Aboriginal people, such imagery asserts and emphasises:

European settler history and the claiming and clearing of Aboriginal land and erasure of Aboriginal sovereignty. They act as markers and borders of the colonial frontier and centre white power within the building, making visiting Indigenous women into ‘non-locals’ or ‘strangers’ who were allocated the use of the ‘back room’ along with Indigenous men and children.

For some local Aboriginal residents and visitors to Northern Queensland, statues of Cook reiterate similar narratives of *terra nullius* and symbolise the continuation of colonial frontiers that treat Aboriginal people as ‘non-locals’ or ‘strangers’. For others, however, the same monuments are integrated in local narratives and are embraced as meaningful cultural frontiers that generate

discussion about Australia's colonial history and relations between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people in both the past and present. This contention exemplifies the complexity of the intercultural in which competing ideas and responses collide in ways that can provoke constructive dialogue, maintain power imbalances or simultaneously do both (Bradfield, 2019).

The land on which a contentious 10-metre-tall statue of Captain Cook is erected in Cairns has recently been purchased in a deal between its former owner, James Cook University, and state and federal governments. This will see the expansion of Cairns University Hospital, set to be completed in 2025 (Warren, 2021). The expansion will increase the region's health capabilities and services, providing additional hospital beds and training facilities. The fate of the statue has been the cause of much debate, with some calling for its removal and others for it to remain. The appropriateness of keeping a statue that has generated strong opposition and is the cause of anxiety, however, must be called into question, particularly since the land is now being used for health and healing. Like the painting within the health centre in Rockhampton, the statue has the potential of further alienating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, marking the hospital as culturally unsafe. After seeking community input to find an "appropriate location" for the statue (Bowles, 2021), James Cook University sold it to a demolition contractor for \$1 who aims to restore it to its "former glory" (Bowles, 2022).

COOK'S TOWN?

Gangaar, or what is now also known as Cooktown, lies in Far-Northern Queensland, 244 km north of Cairns and 1987 km north of Brisbane. According to the 2016 census, 14.5% of Cooktown's population identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander with a median age of 21 (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2020b). The highway that follows the coastline connecting Cooktown to the more populated city of Cairns is known as the *Captain Cook Highway*. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people comprise of 10% (23,961) of Cairn's population, which is slightly less than Cooktown but above Queensland's state average of 4% (ABS, 2020a). Like many regional and urban centres, Cairns, which lies on Gimuy Walubara Yidinji country (DATSIP, 2021), is home to many Indigenous language groups and is a busy hub with high mobility and a steady influx of international and domestic visitors.

As their names suggest, Cairns was named after the former governor of Queensland, Sir William Wellington Cairns (Joyce, 2006), while Cooktown is named after the British explorer deemed to have 'discovered' Australia, Captain James Cook. In 1770, Cook's vessel, the *Endeavour*, was beached on Guugu Yimithirr shores for 48 days. Despite its European name, Cooktown forever remains on Guugu Yimithirr country. In 1874, the name of the settlement was changed from its former more possessive form, *Cook's Town* (Ward, 2020). Yet the countless monuments, artworks, architecture, street and building names,

and town-planning suggest that it very much continues to be the subject of Cook's existence.

Many have written on how European placenames have functioned as expressions of colonial occupation and supremacy through a process of naming the world and rendering Indigenous places and histories as supposedly unnamed (Kearney & Bradley, 2009; Moreton-Robinson, 2004a; Smith, 2012). Reuben Rose-Redwood, Professor of Geography at the University of Victoria, Canada, states that “monuments and place names have long told a particular narrative of history, by placing European colonizers up on a pedestal” (in DeRosa, 2020, para. 7). By simply glancing at the names of various towns, roads, buildings, bays, mountains and other sites of interest throughout Northern Queensland (and, in fact, the world), one encounters a colonial cartography of imperialist possession (Bourke, 2021). Cook gave English names to a total of 106 locations during his voyage in Australia (Cook Shire Council, 2015). Kuku Yalandji, the place where the *Endeavour* first encountered troubles, was named Cape Tribulation, the reef on which the *Endeavour* was beached was named Endeavour Reef, while Waalumbaal Birri, the river that connects Cooktown to the reef and Pacific Ocean, was named Endeavour River (see Image 19.1). The island off the Cape York Peninsula where Cook laid claim to Australia in the name of King George III was fittingly called Possession Beach (Moreton-Robinson, 2015a, p. 3).

Place naming was used not only as a means of claiming land and waters in the name of the British Empire but also to communicate, map and warn future



Image 19.1 Endeavour River, Cooktown Queensland, 2019. (Photograph: Bronwyn Fredericks)

colonisers of the lay of the land so that they may find safe passage. The heads of the Tweed River, for example, were named Point Danger due to the perilous shoals Cook encountered on that stretch of water (Turnbull, 2010). Unlike the local Aboriginal populations, Cook was fully aware that, from the moment of his arrival, more Europeans would likely follow, and that lands and surrounding waters (under a colonial ethos) had now become the possession of the British Crown to use as it saw fit. Place names are monuments in and of themselves standing as reminders of European invasion, expansion and the ongoing colonial project (Wolfe, 1999). Monuments celebrating Cook are as much projections towards an imagined future as they are accounts of the past. Cook became, and arguably still is, the promise of a (white European) future that braids “the time of the past with time of the present to produce memory in and of time, backwards and forwards” (Healy, 1997, p. 17).

Cooktown, as a geographic location and place (Image 19.2), is a colonial monument to Cook. The first impressions of the town are that it is one that prides itself on Cook’s and his crew’s interactions with local Aboriginal people and the surrounding environment during the repairs of the *Endeavour* after it received significant damage on the Great Barrier Reef. Additionally, the town celebrates historic events such as the Goldrush in the 1870s, which saw the town become a major economic, trading and cultural hub. For Aboriginal peoples, however, the goldrush further entrenched the stranglehold of colonisation and resulted in violent altercations that led to an increase in killings and pushed Aboriginal peoples to fringe-dwelling communities on the outskirts of town (McKenna, 2016; Pearson, 1998, 2017). Historian Mark McKenna (2016, p. 171) observes that to “read the Cooktown and Brisbane newspaper reports of frontier violence on north Queensland’s goldfields in the 1870s and 1880s is to confront one of the brazen examples of a ‘relentless war of extermination’ in Australia’s colonial history”.

The establishment of missions that housed Indigenous peoples from different kin-based areas, now known as nations or countries (Babidge, 2015), was not only a tool of colonisation but became necessary for survival at a time when colonial frontiers were becoming increasingly violent. Guugu Yimithirr lawyer, academic, scholar and founder of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, Noel Pearson (2017, p. 272) writes,

The life choices available to the Guugu Yimithirr on the frontiers of Cooktown in the 1880s had nearly collapsed and were diminishing fast. Without the Cape Bedford mission, the Guugu Yimithirr had no good survival options. Yes, like missions throughout colonial history, the Cape Bedford mission both provided a haven from the hell of life on the Australian frontier and facilitated the process of colonisation.

For many, Cook symbolises a pivotal moment in history that instigated Indigenous people’s oppression as well as measures to protect, control and manage their dispossession, all the while maintaining white supremacy. The



Image 19.2 Cooktown, Queensland, 2019. (Photograph: B. Fredericks)

celebration of Cook as a pioneering figure has always been present in Cooktown, with the earliest commemoration occurring in 1887. In 1885, the *Cooktown Courier* stated that the forthcoming lighthouse “will be gleaming over the waste of waters, carrying comfort and an assurance of safety to mariners who have to thread the intricate navigation of our coast...no better monument could be erected to the memory of Captain Cook” (Aussie Towns, 2021, para. 22). Like place names, the lighthouse symbolises the continuing and unfolding process of settler occupation and possession. Such a quote encapsulates the white colonial mentality that envisions the waters as ‘waste’, the coast as theirs to possess and Captain Cook as a pioneer. Where the gleaming light signified ‘assurance’ for the white mariners offshore, it was anything but for the local Aboriginal populations onshore and the indentured South Sea Islanders brought to Australia on what were effectively slave ships (Byrne et al., 2020; Hopkins-Weise, 2002).

Cooks Monument, the first built commemoration of Cook in Queensland, was erected in 1887 in Cooktown and comprises of a sandstone obelisk laid on a granite base (see Image 19.3). A statue of Cook was originally intended to accompany the monument but was abandoned when the premier of Queensland, Sir Samuel Griffith, visited Cooktown and stated that commemorating the event rather than the person was more important (Queensland Government, 2016). Several drinking fountains surround the base of the monument and



Image 19.3 Cooks Monument, Cooktown, Queensland, 1888, designed by Colonial Architects Office, manufactured by Hobbs & Carter. (Photograph: Bronwyn Fredericks)

were once used as drinking sources. Today, they are abandoned and commonly littered with condoms and other materials that tend to keep people away (see Image 19.4).

Today, Cook's voyage of 'discovery' continues to be presented as a feat of European adventure, ingenuity and tenacity. It is one where numerous perils and pitfalls were both faced and overcome. In a 2021 piece for the travel section of *The Australian*, reporter Jeremy Bourke (2021) describes Cook's journey as a "great escape story" through which he sells tourism within Northern Queensland via a language of adventure and the embrace of the unknown frontier. Further, the Cooktown and Cape York Expo is advertised by encouraging the public to plan "your adventure" (Cooktown & Cape York Expo,



Image 19.4 Drinking Fountain of Cooks Monument, Cooktown, Queensland, 1888, designed by Colonial Architects Office, manufactured by Hobbs & Carter. (Photograph: Bronwyn Fredericks)

2021). Such narratives of discovery are predominantly based within and targeted towards non-Indigenous audiences (Image 19.5).

Cook's adventure and interactions with the Guugu Yimithirr resulted in intercultural exchanges that, while should not be deemed as acts of 'discovery', did help record Aboriginal knowledges and languages (or versions of it), which now serve as important historical records. Around 150 Guugu Yimithirr words for local flora, fauna and people were recorded by Sydney Parkinson (botanical illustrator), Cook and other members of his crew (McKenna, 2016, p. 166). The word kangaroo, for example, derives from the misinterpretation of the Guugu Yimithirr word *gangurru* (Dixon, 2008, pp. 131–132). Despite its pronunciation being lost in translation, such documentation signifies an attempt by the colonisers to learn about the so-called Other while also directly contradicting the doctrine of *terra nullius* by acknowledging Aboriginal



Image 19.5 Cooks Monument Plaque, Cooktown, Queensland, 1888, designed by Colonial Architects Office, manufactured by Hobbs & Carter. (Photograph: Bronwyn Fredericks)

peoples' prior presence. The docking of the *Endeavour* also allowed Botanist Sir Joseph Banks to record unique species such as the Black Mountain skink, Black Mountain boulder frog and Black Mountain gecko, which are all endemic to Guugu Yimithirr country and can be found in Kalkajaka National Park.

THE 'GIANT' OF SHERIDAN STREET

Situated on Sheridan Street and visible to passing traffic and those arriving in Cairns by plane, lies a 10-metre-tall statue of Captain James Cook. The structure has been the cause of much debate and controversy pertaining to its cultural appropriateness. The privately owned statue, described by Aboriginal author Tony Birch (2021, para. 6) as “John Cleese performing Basil Fawlty in period dress”, was commissioned by a local developer in the 1970s to make the unit blocks he was building stand out (Rigby, 2020). The statue, which once stood alongside a motel, has since become a tourist attraction and has subsequently been used to advertise local businesses (Bateman, 2017). Although many of the businesses the statue once drew attention to have now closed, its sheer size continues to dominate the landscape and command attention.

Explanations of whom the figure depicts ranges from it being Cook trying to stop Aboriginal people throwing a spear at him, to flat denial it was ever intended to be the explorer—instead suggesting it was originally a highwayman, vagabond or even a pirate. Considering the practices of forced dispossession, theft and pillaging that arose from colonisation, association with piracy is not a far stretch. In 2006, Kudija/Gangalu artist Daniel Boyd reinterpreted E. Phillips Fox's 1902 painting, *Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay* (on which the statue in Cairns is likely based), in a work titled *We Call Them Pirates Out Here* (Fredriksson & Arvanitakis, 2017). In the painting, Boyd replaces Fox's blue skies with menacing storm clouds, the British flag with the Jolly Roger, Cook wears an eye patch with a parrot mounted on his head, along with other popularised pirate iconography. A notable alteration observed by Maria Nugent (2009), a research fellow in the Australian Centre for Indigenous History at Australian National University, is the transformation of two spear-throwing Aboriginal men who feature in Fox's work but appear as native grass trees in Boyd's. Grass trees have historically been known by white Australians as 'black boys' on account that they are thought to resemble the image of a native standing on one leg with spear in hand (Jess, 1878). For Boyd, the Aboriginal men reflect how Cook and the colonisers saw them: as inhuman features of the land, and subjects of Western scientific 'discovery'. In a 2013 work titled *Captain James Crook*, Biripi artist Jason Wing similarly depicts Cook as a thief by covering a bronze bust of Cook with a balaclava (National Gallery of Australia, 2021).

A giant towering over Cairns, the statue holds some comedic value that mirrors the absurdity of the notion that Cook 'discovered' Australia, or that his predecessors 'civilised' Indigenous populations. Similar satirical comparisons were made in 1970 when a series of postage stamps were released in commemoration of Cook as part of Australia's bicentenary. One of the stamps depicted Cook as a "giant to emphasise his stature amongst discoverers" (Ward, 2019, p. 11). Some members of the public likened the image to the fictional explorer Gulliver from Jonathan Swift's 1726 book, *Gulliver's Travels* (Ward, 2019). In Swift's novel, Gulliver sets upon a voyage to civilise the foreign 'savages' he encounters. When shipwrecked on an island resided by tiny people, Gulliver becomes a giant in comparison. Despite his stature, Gulliver's own incivility is exposed when he encounters the advanced society of the locals he seeks to 'enlighten'. Similar comparisons can be made of colonisation in Australia where despite notions of white supremacy, many non-Indigenous people continue to struggle with accepting the benefits and advancement of Indigenous knowledges, technologies and cultures.

The pose and gesture of Cook in the Cairns statue is most likely inspired by Fox's 1902 artwork, which was commissioned by the Australian government to commemorate federation in 1901 (Nugent, 2009, 2015). Fox's painting depicts Cook in an act of conciliation upon arriving at Kurnell, Botany Bay, and his first contact with the local Gweagal people. In the painting, Cook can be seen reaching out to command his crew to refrain from firing on two Aboriginal

men who have their spears raised in the background (Ward, 2019). The painting attempts to capture the chaos and uncertainty of colonisation in a single frame, depicting the possession of land and the anxieties associated with first contact. In a vibrant setting that portrays an atmosphere of movement and angst, Cook stands as a reassuring figure who anchors the chaos and provides a sense of stability with his ability to control his crew, the land and native populations. Nugent (2009, pp. 204–205) observes:

Conciliatory gestures such as Cook's outstretched arm, like all symbols of peace-making, are by their very nature also reminders of conflict and war. And so it works in Phillips Fox's history painting of Captain Cook's first landing. For Cook's outstretched arm to make sense as a conciliatory gesture the violence that it (supposedly) calls to halt must be depicted.

The gesture of the outstretched arm takes on new meaning when Cook is extracted from the surrounding scene of Fox's painting and the imagined context in which he intervenes on his crew. Cook's pose, which replicates other gestures portrayed in colonial artwork of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has been likened by some to the Nazi *Sieg Heil* salute and is seen to reflect his true form, that is, as a symbol of imperialistic fascism rather than a peace-keeper whose leadership curtailed bloodshed. Whether intended or not, the irony of the statue's commanding gesture of 'conciliation' (as shown in Fox's painting) and its contemporary association with the *Sieg Heil* is not lost on those who see it. Aboriginal poet PS Cottier (2018) has suggested that, due to the symbology of and public revulsion towards the genocide committed by the Nazis during the Second World War, similar acts that go unrecognised or are silenced within many colonial narratives (Evans, 2004; Maynard, 2017; Wolfe, 2006)—that statue's association with *Sieg Heil* is perhaps an accurate depiction of Cook and what he stood for.

For some, the statue serves as a billboard for imperialism, inflicting its commanding presence on those who walk below it. In efforts to counter such presentations, some communities in Northern Queensland have recently purchased advertising space for seven roadside billboards with the aim of generating greater awareness of Indigenous sovereignty as well as the history and impact of colonisation (Allam, 2021). The billboards contain imagery of enslaved Aboriginal men and women who were sold to travelling human zoos and slogans such as "Wrong Way Go Black". They practise a form of truth-telling that exposes the silences that monuments and colonial re-enactments often contain.

TOPPLING THE 'GIANT'

Social justice movements such as BLM have called for the removal of colonial monuments worldwide (Abraham, 2021; Lindsey & Smith, 2021; Yeats, 2021). With assistance of social media, activists have mobilised and organised

campaigns to remove such structures, by force if necessary. The organisation *Topple the Racists*, for example, circulated a map that identified 125 colonial monuments in the United Kingdom, with the aim of forcefully removing them (Elsom, 2021). In June 2020, a statue of slave trader Edward Colston was ceremoniously toppled and dumped into the Bristol Harbour. Similar demonstrations occurred in Australia (although no statues have been toppled at the time of writing), including in Hyde Park in Sydney where police stood guard overnight protecting a statue of Cook from protestors (Carlson & Farrelly, 2022a, 2022b; Yeats, 2021). Lefebvre (1991, p. 222) observes that “turmoil is inevitable once a monument loses its prestige or can only retain it by means of admitted oppression and presson”. Such loss of prestige and legitimacy is prevalent among many of the protesters involved in BLM and other activist campaigns and is growing in the wider public.

As part of the 2020 BLM movement, a commemorative statue in Victoria, Canada, erected in 1976 in commemoration of the 200-year anniversary of Cook’s departure from Britain, was dowsed with red paint, symbolising the bloodshed in his and the British Crown’s name (DeRosa, 2020). This form of protest is common practice and has been replicated in numerous other colonial settings throughout the world, including Australia (Gregory, 2021). Despite acknowledging the contention around the statue, its owner expressed his disappointment that the protestors neglected to raise their concerns through ‘calm’ and ‘rational’ dialogue. Such positioning places onus on Indigenous people to accommodate hegemonic expectations of rational consultation, while failing to reciprocate. Governments continuously fail to enact meaningful co-design practices (Fredericks & Bradfield, 2021) and consult Indigenous people via a ‘calm’, ‘rational’ and ‘collaborative’ discussion over numerous matters, including erecting such public monuments in the first place. While the public has a right to engage in a dialogue over what monuments should exist in public spaces, the forums and platforms to have such conversations are often restricted (Carlson & Farrelly, 2022a, 2022b).

Other acts of resistance have taken place in Australia where statues and monuments celebrating Cook have been used as props to challenge dominant and often uncontested colonial narratives (Gregory, 2021; McKenna, 2018; Yeats, 2021). On 26 January 2017, a sign reading “Sorry” was hung from the Cook statue in Cairns. An act described by some as vandalism, others such as Indigenous Elder and scholar Professor Gracelyn Smallwood saw it as an ironic, witty and poignant statement about Australian colonialism and an effective way to provoke debate over the appropriateness of celebrating Australia Day, the day that instigated European invasion (Bateman, 2017). Smallwood commented that the sign was changing the “face of racism in Australia” and that it made a “brilliant statement” regarding reconciliation (Bateman, 2017, para. 8). Writing from her perspective as an Indigenous art and history curator, Margo Neale (in Veth et al., 2008, p. 69) has similarly observed:

Through inversion, parody and irony, Indigenous history tellers challenge codes of entry into and exclusion from the ‘official’ histories and suggest how Indigenous sources may be read back into history, a black history which is complex and comprehensive, not limited to written modes of expression, nor confined to a past on the margins where it remains outside the mainframe and effectively invisible.

The use of humour and irony is commonplace in many protest movements, particularly among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Beetson, 2017; Branagan, 2007; Duncan, 2014). In 2019, David Stevens, a traditional owner from North Stradbroke Island, was charged with wilful damage when he unscrewed a metal plaque off a Cook memorial and used it as a hotplate to BBQ a steak on Australia Day (Stevens, 2019). This ingenious form of protest, which involved him “cooking on Cook”, poetically commented on white Australian iconography of having a “BBQ on Australia Day” while making a poignant argument relating to the celebration of colonisation. Stevens claimed that he did it for his ancestors, as Cook has been made into a hero when he was “a rapist, murderer and genocider of the crown” (Stevens, 2019, para. 8). The photograph taken of the steak grilling on the plaque was appropriately named “Steaking a Claim” (National Museum Australia, 2021b). Steven’s views are shared by a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with a survey conducted by the Australian Museum demonstrating that an overwhelming 87.7% of its Indigenous respondents had negative connotations with the name Captain James Cook, associating him with words such as ‘murderer’, ‘killer’, ‘slaughter’, ‘liar’, ‘theft’, ‘pillaging’ and ‘greed’ (McBride & Smith, 2019). Stevens’ use of humour, however—like other forms of protest—is accompanied by an anger that demands attention change, and ultimately growth (Carlson & Farrelly, 2022a, 2022b).

On Australia Day protests in 2022, a banner reading “cook was cooked” was once again hung over the Cairns statue (Calcino, 2022). The slogan, made in reference to Cook’s death in Hawaii in 1779, plays on the historical debate over whether the native Hawaiians who killed Cook were cannibals and consumed his body. In a lecture for the American Indian and Indigenous Studies programme at Cornell University, Moreton-Robinson (2021, 2022) unpacks the possessive nature of this debate, arguing that through its privileging of white patriarchal voices, Cook’s complicity in violating Hawaiian sovereignty is excused via silencing Indigenous people’s agency and accounts. In what can be described as a contrapuntal inversion of dominant white narratives, it is the white colonial state, and not the Hawaiians, who cannibalistically consume and feed off Cook’s monuments to sustain their unjust and inhumane attempt to possess Indigenous sovereignty and proclaim their own as superiority. Hanging the sign “cook was cooked”, like “sorry” before it, or metaphorically “cooking on cook” are ways that Indigenous voices and the caveats that colonial narratives overlook (Carlson & Farrelly, 2022a, 2022b) are reinserted into the national conversations that often deny Indigenous agency.

Tony Birch, Aboriginal author and founding member of the Melbourne School of Discontent, states, “In general, I agree with the need to decommission and remove any monument that uncritically celebrates empirical conquest and violence” (Birch, 2021, para. 3). He goes on to argue that acts of vandalism do have their place in cutting through colonial deafness. Speaking to both the absurdity of the Cook statue in Cairns and the devastation it symbolises, Birch questions the need for monuments at all, arguing that the very prospect of creating a large-scale testament to Cook merely emphasises the fragility of colonialism and exposes the absurdity of trying to possess and control an enduring and eternal Indigenous country.

Competing online petitions in Australia have sought to have the statue both removed and protected, with comparable petitions found in other settler contexts including Hawaii, Canada, the USA and within the United Kingdom. Emma Hollingsworth (2021), an Indigenous resident in Cairns, for example, has gained over 19,400 signatures in support of its removal. Hollingsworth (2021) states that the statue is a “slap in the face” to Indigenous peoples as well as non-Indigenous Australians who have joined the campaign. Conversely, a petition calling for the statue’s protection has gained over 5000 signature, justifying its argument via the scaremongering mantra of “where will it [political correctness against white Australia] stop” (Bakeet, 2020). In March 2022, James Cook University announced that the statue was sold to a demolition contractor for \$1 (Bowles, 2022). Its new owner will transport the structure 102 km to a private property in Far-North-West Queensland to restore it with the intent of displaying it once more to the public. While its new owner acknowledged its contentiousness, he expressed that there was overwhelming support for the statue to remain in the public, “For every one person you find that says they don’t like it or what it represents, you’ll find another nine that say they do like it...I respect everyone’s opinions and I just hope that everyone respects mine” (Davis & Rigby, 2022, para. 6).

Warren Entsch, Liberal Party member for the division of Leichhardt in Cairns, has stated in parliament that calls for the statue’s removal “is just another example of a noisy few trying to whitewash and rewrite our history with their change-culture mentality” (in OpenAustralia, 2020, para. 1). He goes on to claim that the same people “conveniently forget or simply do not know the history of Cook’s 1770 scientific voyage” (para. 2). Entsch’s characterisation of Cook’s voyage as “scientific”, however, exposes his own ignorance through his failure to acknowledge the secret mission assigned to Cook to colonise the land. As Kate Fullagar (2021, para. 19), Professor of History at the Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences at Australian Catholic University, observes, “whether deliberate or not, histories of the voyages’ scientific enquiries often sanitise Cook by focusing on the sheer volume of the gains, rather than on their decidedly western metric, methods, or effects”. Such characterisations also discount the pre-existing knowledge systems and ‘native science’ (Cajete, 2000) that predates European arrival.

MONUMENTS AND CONTESTED PLACE

Objections to the removal of colonial monuments are often based on the misguided notion that, through their dismantlement, aspects of Australian history will become threatened by a racial divide that severs an otherwise unified nation (Carlson & Farrelly, 2022a, 2022b). Terms such as ‘Australian History’ are synonymous with whiteness and acts of possession, while ‘division’ is framed through a fear of losing white supremacy and the power to define and control narratives of inclusion and exclusion (Moreton-Robinson, 2007, 2015b). This is an ironic standpoint considering that colonial structures and Western epistemologies have contributed to archival silences (Attwood, 2017; Piggott, 2021) and a forgetting described as white ‘amnesia’ (Birch, 1997; Healy, 1997, 2008), which has contributed to the continuation of what Stanner (2011) called the “Great Australian Silence” in 1968. Mark McKenna (2016, p. 176) has argued that “no matter how much our present-day sensibilities might wish to ‘move on’ from histories of violence and oppression, it remains a perpetual obligation to remember the way in which the land was conquered”. Colonial monuments rarely acknowledge this history and have therefore become sites where contested readings of history come to a head.

In response to what has become publicly known as the ‘cancel culture’ movement, former Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton has stated, “I don’t think ripping pages out of history books and brushing over parts of history you don’t agree with, or you don’t like is really something the Australian public is going to embrace” (Rouse, 2020). Reductionist attitudes such as these represent ongoing national debates over what content should be taught within the national curriculum, from whose perspective it should be positioned and the role of critical race theory in exposing how racism is socially acquired, taught and maintained (Bargallie, 2020; Moreton-Robinson, 2004b, 2016). Dutton’s view on the need to ‘embrace’ history as historical archives (Piggott, 2021) is selective and biased towards Eurocentric authorship. Monuments that acknowledge the massacres and atrocities inflicted on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are rare. When such occurrences were acknowledged and addressed in historic accounts, they were often subverted through language such as ‘dispersal’, ‘civilising’, ‘pacifying’ and ‘protecting’, which were all too often synonymous with massacres and other violent acts inflicted on Indigenous people (Attwood, 2017, p. 27). These are the narratives that are ‘brushed over’, resisted within history books and are widely unembraced by the Australian public (Maynard, 2017; McKenna, 2002).

European readings of history are based on notions of measurable and linear time; Aboriginal histories on the other hand are place-based and in a continuing state of emergence (Healy, 1991; Memmott & Long, 2002). For Aboriginal people, history is embedded in place/country. It is maintained through responsibilities to care for and nurture the lands, seas and beings within it, passing on memories and oral histories from generation to generation (Morgan, 2008; Rose, 2000). As place-based accounts are rooted in living memory, Indigenous

histories remain eternal with stories transforming over time in accordance with contemporary experiences and interactions. Historian Steven Muecke (2008, p. 37) has argued that readings of history should not place “time as a founding methodological concept”, suggesting that history needs to transcend time and the culture-nature divide reflected in Western epistemologies. Monuments, such as statues of Cook, and events, such as colonial re-enactments, are not bridges linking the past to the present but rather are emerging and lived representations of a past that is both continuous and adaptive to the present.

Through epistemic understandings of historical objectivity, European accounts of history are compartmentalised and often envisioned as fixed events rooted in the past (Wolfe, 1999). Through their perceived objectivity, dominant historical representations may be easily distorted, romanticised and fabricated, as they take a form as an imagined replication of the past, rather than a lived transmission of it. Anthropologist and historian Patrick Wolfe (1999) argues that colonialism is a structural process that flows through space and time and cannot be reduced to a singular event or regime. Colonial monuments and re-enactments do not merely represent history but reiterate an embodied coloniality that maintains the delusion that Cook accomplished his secret directive of possessing the Southern Continent peacefully and with the “consent of the natives” (Elias et al., 2021; Moreton-Robinson, 2009). Monuments help portray historical narratives that ensure citizens imagine themselves as members of a ‘moral community’ worthy of celebrating (Attwood, 2017, p. 29).

As Indigenous people did not consent to their own dispossession, Cook had to reconcile his mission through other means. Goenpul and Quandamooka scholar, Distinguished Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2007, 2009) has argued that this was primarily through possessing the land, while simultaneously demonstrating the native’s inability to value European material possessions and understand concepts of private property and ownership. This was demonstrated to Cook by the Guugu Yimithirr’s lack of interest in the items he gifted them (McKenna, 2016). Moreton-Robinson (2007, p. 30) reflects that for “Cook to be able to take possession of the east coast of Australia within the consent of the ‘natives’ means he has to position Aboriginal people as will-less things in order to take their land in the name of the King”. Professor of History at Monash University, Bain Attwood (2017, p. 25) describes the dilemma of taking legal possession of land already occupied as necessitating acts of “disavowal” which “acknowledged Aboriginal people were the original people of the land only to argue that they were not actually in possession of it”.

Maria Nugent’s (2015) analysis of colonial re-enactments of Cook’s landing in Kurnell demonstrates how, through performance, non-Indigenous actors simultaneously aim to recreate the past while revising and reconciling history for white sensibilities (see also Gapps, 2002). Indigenous actors play a supporting role within this narrative—colonisation undoubtedly took place on their country—but they are not its lead, for the modern nation is envisioned as being built because of Europeans achieving what Indigenous people were thought incapable of doing, possessing country. Monuments of Cook stand as

mythologised falsehoods that propagate narratives of ‘will-less’ Indigenous people and wilful colonisers who took possession and made use of the land to build a nation. In other words, monuments are ways of disciplining racialised white populations “to invest in the nation as a white possession that imbues them with a sense of belonging and ownership” (Moreton-Robinson, 2007, p. 39).

Indigenous epistemologies provide frameworks through which we can re-envision how history is discussed and engaged with in national discourses (Fredericks, 2009a; Moreton-Robinson, 2016). Statues of Cook may easily topple, but the pages of the history will forever remain. Arguments such as Dutton’s (in Rouse, 2020), which suggest that by tearing down these monuments aspects of Australian history will be denied, or that the “parts of history you don’t agree with” will be avoided, are misguided. To encounter the memory and legacy of Cook, all one must do is look at the surrounding built and social environment. This is particularly made explicit in locations such as Cooktown. Acts such as toppling a statue, cooking a steak on a plaque or hanging a sign over Cook’s neck that reads “Sorry” are seen as threatening as they directly contest accounts of history removed from their oppressive colonial context. Through acts of protest, activists are reiterating how colonial monuments exist within contested spaces, hence making a more astute depiction of a living history and unresolved relations.

Re-enactments such as the performance of Cook arriving at Cooktown, which are now equally organised, negotiated and constructed with Aboriginal collaborators, situate a history shared amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. By embedding Indigenous perspectives and understandings of historic occurrences, colonial accounts become nuanced and reflective of a pluralistic intercultural border zone. In reference to such re-enactments, Ward (2020, p. 18) observes:

Each time the performance is held it is refined, and the moments that resonate most in the present are emphasised and changed. The performance is not so much about how historically accurate the re-enactment is; it is about *what* the performers choose to remember, *how* they remember, and what is *produced* that allows a process of reconciliation of the past to occur.

Toppling statues of and monuments to Cook has less to do with his role as a historical figure, or the attempt to deny, reverse or silence his contribution to Australia’s colonial history. Rather, these acts are concerned with the way historical narratives are presented or, more importantly, what is negated in them. As we discuss in the final section, re-enactments of historical events can aid dominant white colonial structures, but also have the potential to contest their authority. Through organising and co-designing colonial re-enactments, a new historical dialogue has opened, which is representative of a cultural interface and reflective of the complexities of living within ongoing settler-colonial environments.

RECOLLECTING, RECREATING AND REDEFINING RECONCILIATION

Colonial re-enactments relating to Cook primarily centre on his arrival on Dharawal country, or what is now also known as Botany Bay. Like many other settler-colonial nations, Australia continues a long tradition of fantasied re-enactments that celebrate Cook and colonialism as symbols of so-called progress, modernity and nation-building (Healy, 1997). The 1970 bicentennial re-enactments of Cook's arrival on the *Endeavour*, which was staged for television, took place at Botany Bay, and was witnessed by an estimated 50,000 people who lined Sydney's shores (Ward, 2019, p. 10). It was presented as symbolising the "birth of modern Australia". During the same time, Cooktown held its own celebrations of Cook's arrival on Guugu Yimithirr country. Both were attended by Queen Elizabeth II (Schlunke, 2015). The bicentennial celebrations were accompanied by the motto declaring "200 years of progress" (Ward, 2019, p. 7). Over 50 years later, similar attitudes that frame Cook's arrival as the inception of nation-building continue, with the then Prime Minister Scott Morrison stating that Cook's voyage "is the reason Australia is what it is today and it's important we take the opportunity to reflect on it" (Prime Minister of Australia, 2019, para. 6). While true that colonisation has in part helped define Australia, to suggest that it is the singular reason for its wealth and prosperity is to discount the more than 65,000 years of the Aboriginal cultures that predates it. It also veils the slavery, oppression, dispossession and dehumanisation of Indigenous peoples on which 'prosperity' was built. Cook's arrival is shared history, but while it may serve as an origin story for many white Australians, for Indigenous people it is but a drop in the ocean.

Celebrations, re-enactments and commemorations of Cook's arrival have regularly been met by protest from Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples who see the occasion not as the birth of a nation but as a Day of Mourning (Schlunke, 2015; Ward, 2019). In 1970, this was expressed through acts such as releasing funeral wreaths into Sydney Harbour and conducting silent vigils throughout the nation (Darian-Smith & Schlunke, 2020). Similar celebrations and objections occurred in Cooktown when Queen Elizabeth II visited and greeted local children as they waved the Australian flag and the Union Jack.

Since 1960, the Cooktown Re-enactment Committee has organised and recreated Cook's landing at Waymburr with 30 members of the public dressing in period clothing and rowing to shore on whaleboats to recreate interactions between Cook's crew and Guugu Yimithirr (Gapps, 2011; Ward, 2020). The Cooktown and Cape York Expo where the re-enactments take place is a 10-day event focusing on celebration, reconciliation and regional economic renewal (Cooktown & Cape York Expo, 2021). While monuments throughout North Queensland often emphasise Eurocentric readings of Australia's colonial history, the event organisers have made a conscious effort to situate the celebration within an Indigenous context, "without debating Indigenous authenticity" (Cooktown & Cape York Expo, 2021). Acknowledging the impact of colonisation, organisers changed the event's name in 2020 from "Cooktown Discovery

Festival” (TropicNow, 2020). Event organisers have primarily used Guugu Yimithirr language on their website, with colonial European names being complementary. The Expo seeks to emphasise a shared history that celebrates acts of reconciliation such as that which occurred between Cook and the Guugu Yimithirr people.

Over the course of the 48 days that the *Endeavour* was being repaired at Weymburr, the Guugu Yimithirr met with the colonisers on six occasions where they exchanged gifts and engaged in what were described as relatively amicable interactions (National Trust, 2014). When Cook and his crew caught 12 turtles from sacred waters in which hunting was forbidden, an altercation between the two parties arose. Cook and his crew were unaware that hunting was forbidden in the area. This restriction was in place so that turtles could breed and rejuvenate for the following season. When several Guugu Yimithirr people saw the turtles on the *Endeavour*, they attempted (unsuccessfully) to release the *maarmingu* females back into the water (Toovey & Alexander, 2020). In a conscious decision to retaliate through destroying the possessions of the outsiders, the Bubu Gujin, a local Guugu Yimithirr clan group, set fire to Cook’s camp (Moreton-Robinson, 2007). The fire naturally caused some anxiety among the crew who responded by firing their muskets (Moore, 2019). After several warning shots, an Aboriginal man was hit, and the altercation intensified. The Bubu Gujin later ‘smoked’ country by discarding the items Cook had gifted them and setting the surrounding grasses alight to cleanse country of the outsiders and restore balance (Moore, 2019, 2021). The location of the encampment is marked by *Cooks Monument*, a sandstone spire erected in 1887.

The re-enactment tells the account of Yarrbarigu, an Guugu Yimithirr Elder—simply known in Banks’ journal as the ‘Little Old Man’ (Toovey & Alexander, 2020)—who laid down his lance and approached Cook during their conflict. Upon seeing that Yarrbarigu posed no threat, Cook returned the spearheads he had previously taken from the Guugu Yimithirr people. This exchange, which for the Guugu Yimithirr was a component of a peace-making ceremony known as *ngalangundaama* (McKenna, 2016, p. 205), was rightly interpreted by Cook as a form of agreement between the two parties and ultimately prevented further conflict between the Guugu Yimithirr and the colonisers (Kim & Stephen, 2020). Guugu Yimithirr and other Bama (Aboriginal people) of Cooktown and the surrounding countries continue to share stories of Yarrbarigu’s efforts, which ultimately ensured those who were thought to be mere visitors were welcomed and protected while on their country (Moore, 2019, 2021).

Although offered as an example of what Cook acknowledged as an act that ‘reconciled tensions’ (National Museum Australia, 2021a), the story should not be misconstrued as a narrative of white benevolence, atonement or real agreement (Nugent, 2015). It may simply have been a form of communication and action undertaken to avoid further conflict from both Cook and the Guugu Yimithirr people. Cook’s decision to refrain from killing any Indigenous people, as he had done to Aboriginal populations at Botany Bay (FitzSimons,

2019), and Indigenous peoples elsewhere (Obeyesekere, 1997), should not be praised as a compassionate act. As Nugent (2015, p. 194) observes, re-enactments of colonisation often attempt to “re-script the story as a cross-cultural conciliation event” in which Cook’s role in Australia’s colonisation is turned into “a gesture of peacemaking”. While some Indigenous people acknowledge Cook’s bravery and leadership, this cannot be detached from an oppressing colonising regime in which “he was the leader of a genocidal colonizing force that brought great trouble to this land” (McBride & Smith, 2019, p. 17).

The Guugu Yimithirr people never granted Cook and his crew consent to possess the land, nor the turtles that sparked the initial conflict. Some have observed the serendipity of Cook arriving on land that for the Guugu Yimithirr was an area of country reserved for meetings and conflict resolution (Jacobsen, 2018; Ward, 2020). It was ground where blood could not be spilt (McKenna, 2016, p. 202). If the *Endeavour* had docked just a few kilometres either direction, Cook’s, the Guugu Yimithirr’s and Australia’s fate may have been very different. It is important to note that it was Guugu Yimithirr people who initiated acts of diplomacy, performing *ngalangundaama* and bringing peace for the good of all. The rocks where the event took place are now heritage listed and known as Reconciliation Rocks (Toovey & Alexander, 2020). The fact that such an interaction occurred at this specific site of cultural importance cannot be written out of the narrative. The role of place, which is equally embedded within the cultures of Aboriginal people, must be acknowledged as a contributing agent that led towards this act of reconciliation (Memmott & Long, 2002). The interaction is now celebrated by some sectors of the population as the first example of ‘reconciliation in Australia’ (Moore, 2021; Toovey & Alexander, 2020).

Situating the event within an Aboriginal context challenges the power dynamics, supremacy and benevolence that are often attributed to colonisers within dominant historical records. It was Aboriginal systems of governance and Indigenous agency and leadership that resulted in the peaceful outcome for Cook, his crew and the Guugu Yimithirr people. Alberta Hornsby has praised Guugu Yimithirr diplomacy, stating that there is much to learn about how to approach reconciliation through this exchange (in Ward, 2020, p. 11). Hornsby (in McKenna, 2016, p. 206) writes:

This is a really outstanding story of the extent that Aboriginal people go through today to extend that peace to others they share this country with. This visit of Cook is a very important part of our community history. It paved the way for this nation we now call Australia. It’s good that we celebrate this history because there’s such a lot in the story that we can learn from. The interaction between Cook and our Bama, we’re still giving that interaction today.

The re-enactment performed in Cooktown today remains meaningful to some Aboriginal residents who view it as an opportunity to both celebrate their

local community and encourage intercultural understandings between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous peoples (McKenna, 2016). Sharnie Kim and Adam Stephen (2020), journalists for ABC Far-North, document how, for some community members such as Hornsby, Cook's interactions with the Guugu Yimithirr and other Aboriginal people are empowering, servicing as a testament to the strength, diplomacy and leadership of Aboriginal people (Kim & Stephen, 2020). While Eurocentric narratives of first contact and colonial interactions are often distorted, the re-enactments in Cooktown are one way through which historical accounts can be told from Aboriginal perspectives. They enable a narrative and agency that is often silenced, narratives of Indigenous humanity and goodwill despite the cultural ignorance and insensitivity of invading outsiders (Veth et al., 2008). It continues traditions of oral history embedded in place (Healy, 1991) while positioning stories in the present and emphasising their continuation. Like the actions of Yarrbarigu over 250 years ago, it is Indigenous people who remain at the forefront of driving intercultural understanding and conciliation.

CONCLUSION

Reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the more recent non-Indigenous arrivals to Australia continues to be debated within regional and national dialogues. This has particularly been the case in relation to the recent reprisal (but by no means new) BLM and Black Deaths in Custody movements, as well as adjoining dialogues relating to the so-called history wars and cancel culture movements. Opinions of what 'reconciliation' is, its value and what it should entail vary from it being a process of genuine intercultural exchanges that result in healing; a tokenistic gesture that fails to enact meaningful accountability and change; or the outright refusal and/or denial that there is anything that requires conciliation in the first place.

As we have discussed throughout this chapter, public monuments, statues, re-enactments and memorabilia corresponding to Captain James Cook, and the subsequent arrival of European colonisers, are interlocked with discussions of national identity, the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and reconciliation. In a settler society that is still attempting to confront its colonial past, we are left questioning: How monumental is Cook, and what place should he hold in the national imaginary?

For many Indigenous people, monuments celebrating Cook re-assert colonial narratives of white possession through the attempted erasure of Indigenous voices, histories and bodies. This ultimately decontextualises narratives of settler-colonialism from Indigenous ontologies and standpoints. Debates concerning the morality of James Cook—was he a plenipotentiary, pioneer, or pirate?—do have their place in national conversations. The monuments that celebrate his existence, however, have less to do with judgements of Cook's biography and are more concerned with the oppressive colonial regime he

symbolises and the ongoing pursuit of justification for the possession of Indigenous land and the dehumanisation of Indigenous people.

In response, activists are demanding wider recognition for what has been undisputedly known since time immemorial: that prior to, during and after Cook's arrival, the lands and seas now shared with non-Indigenous peoples were and remain Indigenous country flourishing with places imbued with living memory and knowledge. Despite their stature, statues of Cook, such as the one on Sheridan Street in Cairns, symbolise a desperate colonial attempt to retain a grasp of something that is forever slipping through one's fingers, that is, the idea that the colonisation of Australia was a peaceful, lawful, legitimate and uncontested act. The myth of *terra nullius* and the white Australian origin story represented in monuments and the seemingly indestructible materials from which they are moulded, can easily disintegrate through their toppling or via simple acts of resistance such as hanging a sign that reads "Sorry".

While some activists have called for the removal of colonial monuments, the re-enactment of Guugu Yimithirr people's interactions with Cook (as opposed to Cook's interactions with 'the Indians') demonstrates that history can be positioned within Indigenous frameworks and retain meaning for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. If historical monuments and re-enactments are taken as performative acts of 'world-making', we must consider a new normal (Fredericks & Bradfield, 2020) and envision what kind of world we wish to live in. How might historical narratives better represent shared histories that are equally informed by Indigenous agencies and worldviews? Only through listening to and reflecting the voices and authorship of those whose cultures and traditions have and continue to shape the places of our shared existence may we begin to engage in acts of conciliation like those initiated by the Guugu Yimithirr some 250 years ago.

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