

# Remapping the Future



Remapping the Future:  
History, Culture and Environment  
in Australia and India

Edited by

Raelene Frances and Deb N. Bandyopadhyay

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

Remapping the Future: History, Culture and Environment in Australia and India,  
Edited by Raelene Frances and Deb N. Bandyopadhyay

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## PREFACE

RAELENE FRANCES

The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen an increasing trend in the field of Australian Studies for scholars to situate their research within a broader international context and conversation. In some cases this involves exploring how concepts developed in other national contexts can be employed to illuminate aspects of the Australian experience; in others, the focus is on the transnational movement of people and ideas between Australia and the rest of the world. This collection of essays represents a selection of this recent scholarship, particularly in relation to conversations between scholars in Australia and India, auspiced by the Indian Association for the Study of Australia. The essays are drawn from a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives – history, literature, film, education, sociology and politics, cultural studies and environmental studies.

Our first two chapters deal with the question of Australia's relationship to its colonial past and the unreconciled relationship between the invaders and the Indigenous peoples of this continent. Gillian Whitlock's essay challenges us to think about new ways in which we can imagine and locate Australian literary heritage, using a transnational frame. She shows how the use of concepts drawn from Indian scholarship on Subaltern Studies can help decentre the nation in studies of Australian literary history, producing a more 'provincial' and 'vernacular' understanding of heritage to sit alongside the national foundational story. Whitlock argues that 'provincial reading can challenge the optical illusions of nation and narration', making it possible to 'recognise the powerful and affective presence of an unreconciled past in Australian literary and cultural production.'

Therese Davis' survey of films by and about Indigenous Australians over the last decade places particular emphasis on the phenomenon of films and television documentaries produced by Aboriginal Australians – the so-called 'Black wave'. These Indigenous films, she argues, constitute a 'new mode of Indigenous remembrance' which contributes to Indigenous community strengthening. As importantly, they make Indigenous stories

accessible to white audiences both in Australia and internationally in ways that films by even the most sympathetic of non-Indigenous filmmakers are not. Films that successfully engage white Australians in seeing the past from an Indigenous perspective thus provide the basis for white Australians to commence a meaningful dialogue with Indigenous Australians about the future.

In the second section of this volume, three chapters explore different ways in which attitudes to Australia and Australian identity have been shaped historically. Tom Heenan and David Dunstan's chapter looks at the ways in which Australian cricketers attitudes to India have evolved over time. From a predominantly racist and colonialist sense of superiority, over the last decade Australian cricketers have been forced by India's increasing economic dominance of the game to engage with India in a more equal and respectful way.

Robert Kelly's chapter on the backpacker-led reinvention of Gallipoli draws on responses recorded in visitors' books kept by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to chart changing responses of visitors to the Gallipoli battlefields since the 1960s. His analysis demonstrates the shift in recent decades towards celebration alongside commemoration, paralleling the increasing importance of patriotic tourism relative to family or personal pilgrimage in the motivation of visitors. He predicts a future in which the celebration of Australian patriotism will be increasingly expressed through the invocation of Anzac.

Deb Narayan Bandyopadhyay sheds new light on the phenomenon of exhibitions in the nineteenth century through his examination of the transnational personality and 'exhibition wallah', Jules Joubert, and the 1883 Calcutta Exhibition. Through his close reading of Joubert's engagement with Indian culture, he challenges the monolithic interpretation of American and European exhibitions as showcases of superiority. He argues that in this case the exhibition's organiser was genuinely interested in opening a space for cultural exchange between Australia and India.

Engagements with the Australian environment form the focus of the next two chapters. Paul Sharrad's wide-ranging analysis of Tom Keneally's fiction and nonfiction writings offers new insights into this author's portrayal of the environment. While his exploration reveals environmental aspects of Keneally's work that have largely been overlooked, he concludes that it is the 'gossip' rather than the 'forest' that has been Keneally's central preoccupation: culture and history, not their interlinking with nature.

Paul Brown and James Arvanitakis's provocative commentary adopts an inter-disciplinary approach to the case of Australia's scarcity of water. In identifying Australia as in danger of succumbing to a 'progress trap', they chart a new approach that aims to better manage the environment in the interests of a more sustainable future. In particular, they identify an urgent need to integrate and extend participatory environmental management processes based on trust, hybrid 'ecological' knowledge and an understanding of cultural context and power relations.

The final section of this volume looks at various aspects of Australia's approach to its multi-ethnic, multi-religious population. Helen Pringle considers the case of cartoons and their significance in relation to the law. The well-known 2005 controversy about cartoons in the Danish press depicting representations of the Prophet Muhammad raised questions about the relationship of drawn images to freedom of speech, blasphemy and religious toleration. Pringle takes a different example – that of a New South Wales case involving cartoons depicting children as engaged in sexual acts – and asks whether cartoons present any distinctive problems in terms of freedom of speech not posed by other forms of expression. She concludes that in certain circumstances such cartoons can be legitimately classified as child pornography or child abuse. This conclusion, in turn, has implications for the legal status of cartoons as a form of racial/religious vilification.

Claudia Tazreiter is concerned with the politics of humiliation and shame. She argues that both Australia's recent treatment of asylum seekers and its historical treatment of its Indigenous population amount to a form of institutionalised ritual shaming and humiliation which has left a lasting impact on culture and identity as national projects.

Helen Forbes-Mewett tackles the sensitive topic of international student security in her comparative study of Australia and the United Kingdom. Drawing on interviews with industry professionals, she identifies four main themes that contribute to an understanding of the nexus between international education and crime: international students tend to be victims rather than perpetrators of crime; fundamental differences in support and safety structures in Australia compared to the United Kingdom; international students tend to live within 'delinquent prone communities'; and international students are often at risk from crime committed from within their own national groups. A better understanding of this evidence in relation to student security provides a stronger basis for policy and practice in this area.

Mark Gibson's study of recent Indian migration to Melbourne focuses on the implications of its predominantly suburban location. He raises

important questions about the ways in which the porosity of suburbs produces different interactions between host and migrant populations, and different possibilities for the future of multicultural Australia.

The value of these different perspectives on Australia's past and present is that they suggest a variety of ways in which we can imagine, or re-map the future.

**PART I:**  
**HISTORY:**  
**COLONIAL PAST AND INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

## CHAPTER ONE

# “INNAMINCKA”: LIFE NARRATIVE, HERITAGE, TRANSNATIONALISM

GILLIAN WHITLOCK

In 2009 a new anthology of Australian literature was published—for the first time since the *Macmillan Anthology* of 1990. *The Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature*, published internationally as the *Norton Anthology of Australian Literature*, both reaffirmed and questioned Australian literary heritage.<sup>1</sup> In the general introduction its editor, Nicholas Jose, reflects, “our work has taken place against the background of a sense of crisis, real or imagined, in the standing of Australian literature” (Jose, 2009, 1). The work of editing a nation-based anthology is generically anxious, and not specific to this particular project. By promoting a deliberate textual construction of the country and its literary heritage that readers are invited to join, anthologies are, Robert Lecker argues, deeply conflicted books. The anthologisation of literary texts is essential to the work of social memory and cultural heritage. Literary anthologies “construct a narrative that depicts an evolving but often tension-ridden national ethos” and become focal points in debates about literary canons and cultural literacy that are actually debates about national identity (Lecker, 1995, 92).<sup>2</sup>

Jose’s comment is an example of a widespread sense of crisis in nation and narration in Australian literary and cultural studies in the recent past, produced, Chris Healy argues, by the exhaustion of some forms of heritage discourse following the celebration of the bicentenary of settler colonization in 1988. The Indigenous boycott of key events during the bicentenary celebrations—such as the re-enactment of the First Fleet Landing in January 1988—was a powerful statement about the foundation narratives of settler colonialism, which were reframed as occasions for mourning and remembrance of conquest and dispossession. Following the bicentenary there has been an on-going questioning of the inherited

foundation stories, and their place in formations of national identity in a postcolonial nation. In this essay I want to focus on the renewal of foundation narratives as cultural heritage now, focusing on the recent anthologisation and republication of the First Fleet journal by Watkin Tench. Healy argues that the bicentenary revealed there was little nationalist meat in celebrating the establishment of a small penal colony (Healy, 2008, 108). Given this, how are foundation narratives such as this renewed as cultural heritage now? The recent republication of Tench’s journal suggests it retains its power to generate affective images and narratives of the national. Why is this so?

In his General Introduction to the anthology, Jose writes as an “Australian traveller”, imagining an optic produced from great height and at great speed, that produces a remote yet intimate perspective on the land, its literature, and its readers. This account suggests that the narration of literature, land and nation is organic, sequential, and experienced personally as reading the country:

Looking from my window seat as the plane crosses Australia, I can’t help reading stories into the country that unfolds below...Like many an Australian traveller before me, I reflect on the intimate relationship between this extreme, subtle land and the human experiences it has shaped and been shaped by. My contemplation begins with the long custodianship of the land by Aboriginal Australians, and continues on to later visitors from across the seas, including those who became settlers—none more decisively than the small band of mainly British Europeans who landed at Sydney Cove in 1788 (Jose, 2009, 1).

First Fleet narratives are ‘decisive’ in the national story. Jose’s vision is sequential: the “long custodianship” (Jose, 2009, 1) of Indigenous Australians and then the decisive event: colonization by the “small band of mainly British Europeans” (Jose, 2009, 1). As a result, Indigenous, settler, and migrant writers struggle to shape a national literary language through speech and writing in English. Australian literary heritage is embedded in the long aftermath of settler colonialism, and on-going debates about reconciliation and social justice. Jose maps the country from an elevated Cartesian viewpoint, which “reads stories into the country” (Jose, 2009, 1) in anthropocentric space and time. This is, as Robert Dixon remarks, the singular vision of cultural nationalism, “which sees land, literature and nation as expressive of a distinctive organic identity” (Dixon, 2011, 2). The framing of that “decisive” event when a “small band of mainly British Europeans” landed at Sydney Cove in 1788 is central to the perceived crisis in discussions of literary heritage and social justice in Australia now. In this essay I want to focus on the recent history of the First Fleet memoir

by Watkin Tench as symptomatic. The status of this account as literary heritage has been affirmed in its inclusion as one of the first extracts in Jose's *Anthology of Australian Literature*, its recent republication in a new edition by Tim Flannery with the new title, *1788*, and the widespread adoption of Tench's autobiographical "I" in recent historical fiction and ethno-history.

My reading of *1788* is grounded in a specific location in the central desert region of Australia, a small town called Innamincka. Here numerous heritage sites commemorate human and non-human histories across different coordinates of space and time. Named after two Aboriginal words meaning "your shelter" or "your home", Innamincka and the adjacent central desert region are significant in histories of Indigenous peoples: for thousands of years the Cooper Creek was a major Aboriginal trade route and a source of abundant food and water. Later routes of European continental exploration and settlement converged here. The inland expeditions of the explorers Charles Sturt and the ill-fated Burke and Wills, who died nearby, are commemorated at the Innamincka visitors centre and at memorial sites nearby. The great stock routes and camel trains of the pastoral industry in the late nineteenth century cross the region. Later, in the twentieth century, Innamincka was the site of an Australian Inland Mission hospital, an icon of a pioneering settlement now restored as the site of the visitors centre. For much of the last century Innamincka languished as a ghost town, devastated by drought, and it was reoccupied in the early 1970s after the discovery of major gas and oil reserves in the region. These days Innamincka is a remote township in a regional reserve that supports diverse industries: mining, cattle, and heritage tourism. At Innamincka entangled histories trouble singular or foundational narratives of Australian literary heritage that focus on a small band of British Europeans.

In the midst of a booming tourist season in 2009, when tourists converged on the region to see a natural wonder, the flooding of the massive Lake Eyre basin after a decade of drought, Tim Flannery's recent edition of Tench's *First Fleet* journal, *1788*, was prominently displayed for sale at the Innamincka roadhouse amidst other popular books—romances, mysteries and travel guides, all selected to attract the passing trade at this point where travellers, tourists and local inhabitants converged. Several questions recur throughout this paper about the associations of this book and this place in terms of cultural heritage, environmental history, and remembrance of things past in contemporary Australia. Firstly, how are books like this one, a *First Fleet* journal originally published in the late eighteenth century, marketed and read as cultural heritage in Australia

now? The inclusion of Tench’s journal in Jose’s edition of a new anthology is one sign of its status as a heritage text, and this recent republication is another. Secondly, what happens when we turn to explore these issues in a transnational frame? Most particularly, why do a series of recent Australian studies suggest the particular value of Indian and Australian connections in re-thinking literary heritage?

“Heritage” refers to “inherited customs, beliefs and institutions held in common by a nation or community...[and] natural and ‘built’ landscapes, buildings and environments held in trust for future generations” (Davison as qtd in Healy, 2008, 278). Heritage is connected to social memory: the ways a community understands itself and its relation to the past, and the way individuals understand their being in history. Heritage, then, is plural, performative, and connected to multiple and conflicting archives of social memory. The community of common interest and sentiment might be the nation, or small communities within the nation shaped by alternative kinship and commemoration. Healy makes a critical point about heritage as a concept. In the shift from thinking about “history” to talking about “heritage” we are turning to question how historical understanding is put into effect and experienced subjectively, thereby playing a role in governance and citizenship. Heritage is about how people experience the past in everyday life customs and practices, beliefs and institutions. It is one of the key modes in which the past is carried into the present. When we are thinking about the national community, heritage is fundamental to how people understand and experience citizenship and belonging in the course of embodied practices in everyday life.

The presence of Tench’s canonical text at Innamincka is emblematic of a critical conjuncture in debates about heritage and the marketing of canonical heritage texts in Australia now. At Innamincka unreconciled and incommensurate histories produce heritage sites that archive multiple human and environmental histories and chronotopes. Tourists and travellers encounter ways of being in history that cannot be simplified in a singular heritage discourse, particularly the foundation narratives that privilege a small band of Europeans at Sydney Cove in 1788. Reading the country here involves entangled human and non-human histories, with the country itself as an agent rather than a passive setting. Jose’s reading of country sustains a resolutely human-centred focus, placing land as a passive component of anthropocentric space and time. Increasingly this speciesism and exclusion of non-human living things is called into question as environment is included in heritage discourse. At Innamincka, where landscape and settlement is determined by drought and flood, and settlement is tenuous and has been reduced to a spectral presence in the

recent past. The skeletal remains of deserted buildings are everywhere here.

In 1788 Flannery draws together two journals, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay* (1789) and *A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson* (1793) originally published by Watkin Tench, a lieutenant in the marine corps on board Australia's First Fleet. This is the "small band of Europeans" that Jose refers to: a transport of 1,000 people, 700 of them convicts, aboard 11 ships that set sail from Plymouth on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1787 to establish a British colony at Botany Bay. It was a controversial project: both a settler colony and a penitentiary. Tench was by that time already an experienced marine. He had been a prisoner of war in Maryland during the American War of Independence in 1778, and after his tour of duty with the First Fleet he returned to England in 1793 and saw active service in the Napoleonic Wars, when he was again captured and held as a prisoner of war. Later he published another journal, *Letters Written in France*, his impressions of the French Revolution.<sup>3</sup> Tench was a cosmopolitan man, and his account of the first settlement is generally considered to be the most eloquent and literary, the one that captures the landscape, people and settlement with the most engaging eye. Tench is a powerful and graphic narrator, translating the new world into his journal self-reflexively: he is taking notes, and shaping his account from the midst of the new settlement itself, a vivid work in process.

Tench's account of the voyage and settlement is recognised as one of the five "foundation books" of Australian colonial history. The other accounts were by more authoritative authors, but Tench's was the first eyewitness account of the settlement to be printed, rushed to press in England and published as a pocket-sized pamphlet on April 24<sup>th</sup> 1789, just two years after the Fleet sailed from Plymouth. Tench's second journal, *A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson*, was published for the first time when Tench returned to England in 1793. Publication was in London, Dublin and New York, and it was translated into French, German and Dutch. The career of the *Narrative* late in the eighteenth century indicates the interest of the general public in the Australian settlement at Port Jackson, and the vividness of Tench's eyewitness account. But the history of this foundation narrative is a chequered one. It was not republished until 1938, and then again in 1961. At this stage of its career it was regarded as an historical document, a key text in the national heritage, extracted and anthologised for a specialist and academic reader. This century it has been revived and read in its entirety as a vivid and powerful life narrative, 1788, and marketed as a trade paperback to a general public, stocked in mass outlets such as roadhouses, airport bookstores, and

supermarkets. Its publisher, Text, is associated with new ways of writing Australian history that emphasize the civic, ethical and personal responsibility of public intellectuals in a national public sphere (Carter and Ferres, 2001, 152). Although I was taken aback to find this First Fleet journal in a remote roadhouse at Innamincka, I shouldn't have been. This is a key site in the heritage industry, shaped by pilgrimages that retrace pioneering trails such as the Birdsville track, the Strzelecki Trail, and the Canning stock route. *1788* enters a vibrant contemporary heritage industry, but how does it respond to that heritage crisis which calls into question the role of the First Fleet in Australian heritage?

The cover of Flannery's edition is indicative. Tim Flannery is a powerful patron and advocate—an editor whose name on the cover of some editions is in larger font than the original author's. He is a celebrity scientist, environmentalist, humanitarian and writer. As an eminent public intellectual, Flannery has the power and authority to make interventions in how heritage is defined and understood in Australia now, and the paratexts of *1788* suggest how important his endorsement is to attract a broad twenty-first century readership. On the back cover<sup>4</sup> we see Flannery's celebration of Tench's journal as “a brilliant eyewitness account of the British settlement of New South Wales” (Flannery, 1996) is reinforced by a formidable selection of eminent contemporary Australian public intellectuals: the historians Robert Hughes and Inga Clendinnen, author Thomas Keneally, poet Les Murray, and Indigenous writer and activist Marcia Langton.

Indigeneity is one reason why this eyewitness account is renewed as a significant cultural heritage. The front cover features a quotation from Tench's journal: “I do not hesitate to declare that the natives of New South Wales possess a considerable portion of that acumen, or sharpness of intellect, which bespeaks genius”.<sup>5</sup> The journal brings Indigenous Australians into view in a humanitarian frame: Tench introduces Indigenous people such as Banneelon, Abaroo, and Colbee as individual and memorable people; he learns their language and puzzles over the problems of translation; he describes walking along the beach, hand-in-hand with a young European child, to engage with Aborigines personally, and he recalls moments of joyful caper and dance together. It is Tench who appeals to the reader with a “candid and humane mind” (Flannery, 1996, 45), recognizing Aborigines as fellow humans, drawing on late eighteenth century humanism and romanticism to shape his account. Like Jose, Flannery is an editor in search of an engaged readership, and he too folds foundation narratives such as this into a sweeping and sequential

history. Both humanitarianism and environmentalism shape Flannery's editorial gaze:

The European settlement of Australia occurred so swiftly, and altered the land and indigenous cultures so profoundly, that it can be difficult to imagine what the country was like before the first white settler walked ashore. If we wanted to picture that different land, and think about how it has been transformed, there's no better guide than Watkin Tench's extraordinary accounts of Australia's first European settlement (Flannery, 1996, 1).

Flannery's "land" is not the passive and compliant "country" that Jose's incorporates into an anthropocentric national estate. Here the land and Indigenous people are imagined in a pristine state prior to colonisation—this, too, is a way of "forgetting" Aborigines, and telling a foundation story that occludes the specific historical and cultural locations of Indigenous presence.

The renewal and endorsement of this First Fleet account is a sign of shifts in practices of remembrance that we can track in the ebb and flow of life narratives such as Tench's journal. Life writing includes autobiographical and biographical accounts of all kinds, for example journals, diaries, memoirs, and letters. It gives an intimate insight into who is empowered to write autobiographically, and what lives count in discourses of heritage and commemoration and citizenship. This suggests shifting relations of power and authority, indicating whose lives are remembered, and why. Flannery appeals to a new readership for Tench's narrative, in the wake of that sense of crisis in the politics of race and reconciliation that engaged Australian public intellectuals late last century. It also returns to foundation narratives with the new ecological awareness of the fragility of land and settlement which emerged early in this new century.

Editors of anthologies and First Fleet journals, such as Jose and Flannery "read the country" subjectively, and so too do tourists, travellers and inhabitants. If, as Healy suggests, "heritage" is fundamental to how we experience citizenship and belonging in the course of practices of everyday life, then our understandings of the past in the present are not abstract and theoretical but imaginative, embodied and subjective, experienced in the various and shifting registers of specific localities. At Innamincka multiple heritage sites testify to irreconcilable histories. There are the inhabited territories of the prior inhabitants, dispersed from the area after violent conflict as the pastoral industry expanded in the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> The mapping of Indigenous pasts becomes even more complicated on the ground at heritage sites around Innamincka itself. What are memorialized there are the remains of its first inhabitants in

Aboriginal middens and rock art. Indigenous artefacts are preserved as heritage alongside monuments that record the remains of European inland exploration. Most famously, the relics of the Burke and Wills expedition of 1860-61 are commemorated with rock cairns as memorials to the explorers, as well as the “Dig Tree”, carved to mark the location of their depot camp. This expedition introduced camels to the central desert region. The overland routes of the animals and Afghan and Pakistani cameleers mark the multicultural population of Asian people and exotic animals introduced to serve the pastoral industry in the nineteenth century. All of this became spectral when Innamincka was abandoned to become a ghost town last century. Here, amidst multiple heritage sites, the instabilities and uncertainties of national heritage discourse and foundation stories are readily apparent.

What happens when thinking about literary heritage is projected transnationally? Can issues of race, heritage and belonging be imagined differently beyond the nation? In Australia in the recent past these questions are pursued with a turn to Indian postcolonial criticism. Paul Sharrad argues that complex and less nation-centred studies of Australian literature are emerging from transnational scholarship: Australian literature extends far beyond the geographical boundaries of the nation, and interesting things happen to its identity and character when we turn to perspectives that leave home and go offshore, or when comparative perspectives respond to transnational literary networks that reframe local and national narratives (Sharrad, 2010, 3). Graham Huggan’s recent book, *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transculturalism*, also argues that writers, researchers and teachers who look at Australia from the outside have a vital contribution to make to debates about cultural heritage and belonging in a settler society. Huggan is particularly interested in issues of cultural heritage:

It goes without saying that no single cultural heritage exists for Australian literature, any more than one exists for Australia. Despite this, the battle over heritage—which is also a battle for ownership—has been keenly fought. Race, as this book will suggest, represents the often hidden face of the continuing struggle for cultural ownership in Australia (Huggan, 2007, viii).

Huggan turns to critical race theory to analyse this battle over heritage in Australia now, arguing that we need to consider not just Indigeneity but also the politics of whiteness, and how the politics of a white settler culture continue to surface in Australian writing and criticism in, for example, a preoccupation with “first settlement” and that small band of

Europeans. For Huggan too, the transnational turn can raise new perspectives on the ways that the colonial past continues to haunt the present in Australian writing.

Sharrad suggests that Australian literature is reconstructed in India, where it is studied by scholars with their own agendas, different social dynamics, different curricula and pedagogies, and different kinds of access to primary and secondary materials—what is affordable, available (Sharrad, 2010, 3). If we think of Australian literary studies in India as a transnational project we immediately get to questions about how it is “creatively reconstructed” in the Indian spaces of Australian literature. How might different ways of thinking about Australian literature arise from this conversation? How does the Australian context reframe discussions of Indian literature and criticism? How does transnationalism introduce new perspectives on the issues of literary heritage that are the subject of this paper? What is critical here are the traditions of postcolonial scholarship that have been generated by the Subaltern Studies project. Although this project has been influential in postcolonial, historical and cultural studies internationally, the connections between Subaltern Studies and Australia are close. Some of its leading exponents, Ranajit Guha and Dipesh Chakrabarty, have worked in Australian academia. The critique of nationalism that grounds Subaltern Studies is timely at a critical conjuncture in Australian Studies where cultural nationalism produces conflicted histories.

Chris Healy turns to India to think about ways of developing a new idiom for citizenship and models of sovereignty and collectivity that might respond to the issues of diverse cultural heritage. Healy turns to Ranajit Guha’s work on vernacular histories in postcolonial India, a different yet related colonial context. Guha is best known as the editor who gathered together the group of scholars known as the Subaltern Studies Group, an Indian historian and political economist resident in Australia when the first volume appeared.<sup>7</sup>The project called for new self-reflexive historiography from the view of the masses, using unconventional sources such as popular memory, oral discourse and colonial administrative documents. “Vernacular” is a contested term in recent criticism in India (Krishnaswamy), and concepts and methodologies such as this derived from the Subaltern Studies project are adapted and reformulated as they circulate in transnational scholarship elsewhere. What the turn to vernacular might mean in Indian literary historical criticism is suggested by Guha’s recently republished analysis of Bangla vernacular literatures of the nineteenth century. Here he elaborates the various temporalities and vernaculars of everyday life in the colonial city, and the new prose forms

that emerged to represent Indigenous (as opposed to official) experiences on the streets of Calcutta. Heterogenous space/time trajectories are mapped out here, for example the co-presence of Indigenous and official ways of seeing in Calcutta’s “everyday”, as opposed to the singular, authoritative narration of colonial time. The intertextuality of Bangla and British literary forms—in this case the Dickensian sketch and Kaliprasanna Sinha’s *Hutom*—produces new discursive forms that are both complicit with and resistant to colonialism, appropriate to “the advent of a new temporality rivalling one that was habitual and sanctified by custom” (Guha, 2011, 336).

For Healy, this concept of “vernacular” and the multiple chronologies that co-exist in Guha’s thinking on postcolonial “time(s)” translates to ways of thinking about Australian heritage in terms of specific or micro-histories that remain unrecognised in registers of national heritage: “vernacular heritage can describe those understandings of heritage which are marginal to, or silenced by, the authority of ‘official’ heritage...” (Guha, 2011, 127). Healy turns to Guha’s vernacularity of “accents, idioms and imaginaries” foreign to the language of post-enlightenment reason and “unspeakable” in the rationality of colonisation to argue that vernacular pasts must find a place in the terrain mapped by national history. Vernacular histories are not more authentic or accurate—this is not an evaluative term, there is no “authentic subalterneity” recovered here (and it is this association of “authenticity” and “vernacularity” that has been contentious in the Indian debates discussed by Krishnaswamy). Vernacular histories exist in tension with official history, replacing the singular and unified national heritage with narratives articulating different temporalities, idioms and feelings in a space of translation and exchange. One of Healy’s examples of vernacular history is the performance of Indigenous ceremonies during the bicentennial in January 1988 at the place where Captain Cook came ashore at Kurnell near Sydney. This gathering of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people replaced the celebration of heritage as an inclusive patchwork, the official discourse of the bicentenary, with “an articulation of vernacular heritage as a shared commitment to reconciliation” (Healy, 2008, 130)—which is to say an active process of citizenship. For Healy, the transnational turn places the unresolved questions around colonialism at the centre of attempts to articulate the nation. Foundational narratives are disaggregated and decentred, taken out of sequence and cast into local, regional, national and transnational contexts.

Recently Robert Dixon also turns to Indian postcolonial scholarship to explore transnational methodologies for Australian literary studies, in his

case Dipesh Chakrabarty's concept of "provincialisation". Like Healy, Dixon is looking to establish new settings for critical reading, using coordinates that map local and transnational associations, defamiliarising the national so that its claims on the individual are "relative and provisional" (Dixon, 2011, 2). "Provincialisation" and "vernacularity" migrate from Subaltern Studies into Australian studies as ways of displacing (not replacing) the national as the necessary horizon of interpretation. To return to the metaphor of the visual optic that begins this essay: transnationalism is a strategy that alters the limited vision of cultural nationalism and its reading of country through the lens of sequential and anthropocentric space and time.

By taking *1788* to Innamincka in this essay I have been arguing that provincial and vernacular readings of foundational narratives recognise the powerful and affective presence of an unreconciled past in Australian literary and cultural heritage. New editions of national anthologies and foundation narratives—such as *The Literature of Australia* and *1788*—and the work of editors such as Jose and Flannery are signs of the key role literature plays in mobilising historical understanding and experiences of citizenship in the postcolonial nation. They also suggest that much remains to be done to reframe ways of seeing the place of the small band of Europeans that came ashore in 1788. The hierarchies of relations that anchor foundation stories of Australian settlement as national heritage resist provincialisation, as we see in the recent editions by Flannery and Jose. The specific attention to contexts that elude the prism of the national is a feature of the Indian postcolonial (Boehmer & Chaudhuri, 2011, 4) that surfaces in different ways of thinking about literary heritage in Australia now. New ways of reading the country occur unexpectedly: by relocating literary heritage in terms adapted from this very different and in some ways remote scholarly project. The provincial and the vernacular bring heritage close, to the grounds of our experience in everyday life, to the sentimental feelings and the ethical obligations of citizenship. At Innamincka, heritage refuses to cohere into a single foundation story. *1788* has a place here, where provincial reading can challenge the optical illusions of nation and narration.

## Notes

1. This anthology was published internationally as the *Norton Anthology of Australian Literature*.
2. Significantly an anthology of Indigenous Australian literature was produced alongside the new Norton anthology, edited by Anita Heiss and Peter Minter.
3. For an excellent article on Tench’s *Letters written in France* see Gavin Edwards, ‘From Chester to Quimper via Sydney: Watkin Tench in Revolutionary France’. [http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/uploads/docs/s2\\_5.PDF](http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/uploads/docs/s2_5.PDF). Accessed 8 October 11.
4. An image of this can be seen at the site of Text Publishing, which has produced several versions of Flannery’s edition—as, for example, a single text, and in association with other explorer journals.
5. See the image online as above.
6. See the Aboriginal Australia map at <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/asp/map.html>. Accessed 8 October 11.
7. In September 2011 a conference at the Humanities Research Centre celebrated the Australian connections to the Subaltern Studies project on its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. See <http://hrc.anu.edu.au/events/subalternstudies>. Accessed 12 October 11.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# “A BEGINNING”: REVIEWING AUSTRALIA’S COLONIAL PAST IN INDIGENOUS FILM AND TELEVISION

THERESE DAVIS

Ivan Sen’s film] *Dust* (2000) offers the potential of *a beginning*—the commencement of an exchange—as it recognises that, before dialogue for the future can be accomplished, Indigenous people who lie in the ground and the past they inhabit need to be recognised and commemorated so that the burden carried by elders ... can be lifted. This can only be done when white Australia takes vigilant responsibility for its own past (Birch 2007, 114) (emphasis added).

Since the inception of the Indigenous Branch of the Australian Film Commission in 1993, Indigenous filmmaking has developed at a phenomenal rate.<sup>1</sup> It has become what Maureen Barron, former Chair of the Australian Film Commission, describes as “one of the most critically lauded and successful sectors of the Australian film industry” (Barron, 2007, v). In the past five years it has set the standard for larger sectors across all industry benchmarks: innovative production initiatives, national and international awards, bold storytelling, box-office successes, and television sales<sup>2</sup> It is a diverse body of work, with filmmakers adopting and adapting a wide range of film and television formats (shorts, features, documentary) and genres (drama, comedy, historical documentary, musicals) to tell Indigenous stories.<sup>3</sup> These works are more than films *about* Indigenous Australians; they differ from a larger body of film and television featuring Indigenous subjects made by non-indigenous filmmakers (from ethnographic film dating back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to recent popular feature films such as Phillip Noyce’s *Rabbit-Proof Fence*) in a number of significant ways, including creative control of content. The Indigenous Department of Screen Australia (as it is now known) defines Indigenous film as works “where Indigenous Australians have been credited

in the key creative roles of producer, director, writer or director of photography (DOP)” (Screen Australia, 2010, 3). For the past twenty years the unit “has provided a sustained funding, training and screening platform that is unprecedented anywhere else in the world, for any filmmakers” (Riley, 2007, 2). This successful strategy has resulted in a small (but rapidly growing) “community of filmmakers” who represent a wide range of Indigenous communities from across the country (Gallasch, 2007, 14) and many are counted among Australia’s most talented filmmakers.

It is, however, important to recognise that the training and professional development of Indigenous filmmakers is not simply a programme of equal opportunity. Nor is Indigenous film defined simply by authorship. The Indigenous Department’s vision to create a sustainable Indigenous sector within the Australian screen industry is historically tied to the wider political project of Indigenous self-determination. It was established as a direct result of a long running campaign by Indigenous activists and filmmakers for the right to self-representation and to greater control over Indigenous screen content, past and future (Bostock, 2007, 7-11). (In addition to providing a unique model of training and funding projects, the unit has also developed world-leading protocols for filmmakers working with Indigenous communities).<sup>4</sup> So while professional Indigenous film and television is not a counter cinema, in the sense that it receives government support and operates in the mainstream, it is a deeply political cinema. It involves filmmakers actively drawing on Indigenous cultural knowledge, protocols and their personal and collective life experience as Indigenous Australians to devise culturally specific (and appropriate) models of filmmaking that result in films and television programmes viewed by multiple audiences (including Indigenous and non-indigenous; Australian and international). In doing so, these filmmakers use film and television as a key cultural sphere for developing what leading Indigenous filmmaker Rachel Perkins describes as “much needed Indigenous perspectives” (Perkins, 2008, 26) on Australia and its history.

This chapter reflects on the theme of “remapping the future” by considering how Indigenous perspectives on Australia’s colonial past in the films and television series by Indigenous filmmakers can, as Aboriginal writer and historian Tony Birch suggests, potentially shape future relationships between Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. For Birch, this potential is dependent upon film enabling two distinct forms of historical recognition. The first is the remembrance and commemoration of “Indigenous people who lie in the ground and the past they inhabit” (Birch 2007, 114). The second involves white Australian viewers’ recognising that these histories of colonial violence and loss are

of our making. Birch argues that only when the latter recognition occurs, lifting the “burden” of remembrance currently carried by Indigenous elders, can we begin a dialogue for the future. This chapter examines two well-known Indigenous screen projects that deal with colonial histories in very different ways. It argues that these works do more than bring “hidden” Indigenous histories to light. They also employ audio-visual aspects of film and television in ways that allow viewers to see that colonial histories continue to impact on Indigenous people’s lives in the present time. It argues that this latter form of historical consciousness—that is one that connects the present and the past—is a crucial step for the beginning of meaningful cross-cultural dialogue on Indigenous and non-Indigenous co-existence and our shared future.

### **The “Problem” of Indigenous Perspectives in Australian History**

In the first half of the twentieth century Australian histories routinely combined stories of pioneer hardships—“the battler’s story”—with legendary accounts of survival and failure (Burke and Wills, lost child stories, Gallipoli, and so on) (Curthoys, 2006, 7). Writing about their role in the Australian historical imaginary, Ann Curthoys describes these histories as “narratives of reversal” or stories that deny Indigenous ownership of the land. As she writes:

Like so many others, from the United States to Canada to Israel and elsewhere, settler Australians have tended to see themselves as victims, not oppressors ... They have seen themselves as the rightful owners of the land in contrast to Indigenous peoples, perceived as nomads, whose hold upon it is tenuous and undeserved (Curthoys, 2006, 7).

By the 1960s onward many Australian historians had begun to contest pioneer narratives, bringing to light stories of the nation’s history of land seizure, frontier conflicts and massacres, Indigenous dispossession and economic exploitation and other forms of social control of Indigenous Australians (Curthoys 2006, 8). By the mid-1980s, these revised histories had become the new orthodoxy, influencing tertiary education and fostering a new generation of Australian historians. In the 1990s the new orthodoxy was adopted by the Australian Labor government, as evidenced in legislation from this period on Indigenous rights and the then Prime Minister Paul Keating’s landmark reconciliation speech in which he challenged pioneer histories and famously called on white Australians to take responsibility for colonial atrocities: “*We* took the traditional lands

and smashed the traditional way of life. *We* brought the disasters. The alcohol. *We* committed the murders. *We* took the children from their mothers. *We* practiced discrimination and exclusion” (Keating, 1992). Yet, as Curthoys observes, while these revised histories were accepted in many areas of Australian society they “met bedrock resistance in non-indigenous Australian popular culture” (Curthoys, 2006, 7). Certainly this was the case in film. Up until the twenty-first century, films about Indigenous people, issues and/or historical episodes received national and international critical acclaim while at the same time failing to attract popular audiences.<sup>5</sup>

Conservative politicians exploited this popular resistance. When the Keating government was defeated in 1996, the new conservative Prime Minister, John Howard, set himself the personal task of contesting the revised histories. He fostered a working relationship with Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey, the latter known for helping to popularise the term “black arm-band history”, a phrase that characterises the new orthodoxy as a white guilt-producing history.<sup>6</sup> Howard’s determination to reinstate a heroic, pioneer-type narrative of Australia’s past as the official national story marked a major turning point in the popularisation of debates about Australian history that have become known as the “Australian History Wars” or the “Aboriginal History Wars”.<sup>7</sup> This chapter is not the place to revisit all of these debates, but it is important to note that public battles over Aboriginal history reached a climax in the early 2000s, dividing the nation. A long running campaign against the findings of the federal governments into what is now known as Australia’s Stolen Generations<sup>8</sup> conducted by a handful of high-profile print journalists and the conservative magazine *Quadrant* resulted in what Robert Manne describes as a noticeable “hardening” in public attitudes toward the question of historic injustices suffered by Aboriginal people (Manne, 2003, 7). The other half of the nation remained committed to a groundswell of support for Indigenous reconciliation that had grown as a result of a number of important national events in the 1990s. These events included the monumental *Mabo* judgement in 1992, which overturned Australia’s common law by recognising Native Title, the formation of the Aboriginal Reconciliation movement, Indigenous protests at the Olympic Games in 2000, and the popular demand for an official national apology to the Stolen Generations.

In *Australian Cinema After Mabo*, Felicity Collins and I examined the role cinema played in this period of the history wars of mediating revisions of the nation’s treatment of Indigenous Australians in a way that the written histories cannot (Collins and Davis, 2004). We addressed a significant cycle of historical dramas released in 2002, arguing that these

films contributed to debates on Aboriginal history by engaging audiences in the history wars through popular fictional genres such as adventure-quest (*Rabbit-Proof Fence*), frontier parable (*The Tracker*) and courtroom drama (*Black and White*). *Rabbit-Proof Fence* successfully reversed the longstanding lack of interest by Australian audiences in Indigenous stories by becoming the second highest grossing Australian film that year. Yet, like the many films on Indigenous people and issues that came before them, their stories of conflict between Indigenous and settler cultures are shaped by western modes of narrative and historiography. They are also addressed primarily to non-Indigenous audiences through techniques such as the use of lead non-Indigenous characters. For example, the story of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* was first published as a work of history based on the author’s mother’s oral history but later scripted for the screen as an adventure-quest film structured around a contest of wills between AO Neville (played by international film star Kenneth Branagh), the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia from 1915 to 1940, and three young Aboriginal girls (played by non-professional actors). Adaptation of history to drama is not uncommon and not necessarily a bad thing to have happened in this case, for the film’s appeal to large numbers of non-Indigenous audiences served as an important intervention in the “history wars” (Collins and Davis, 2004). My point is that *Rabbit-Proof Fence* is not an “Indigenous film” in the sense discussed earlier, and nor does it offer an Indigenous perspective on this historical episode.

Less noted in discussion of this period is the fact that 2002 was also a pivotal year for Indigenous filmmakers. It saw the release of Ivan Sen’s *Beneath Clouds*, the third (and at that time the most successful) feature film directed by an Australian Indigenous filmmaker. It was not as popular with audiences as *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. It did, however, win widespread critical acclaim, with Sen pipping veteran director Philip Noyce to the post by taking the award for Best Achievement in Directing at the 2002 Australian Film Institute Awards (more on this film below). Also in 2002, Indigenous screen writer, director and producer, Rachel Perkins seized an opportunity presented to her by Australia’s Special Broadcasting Service (SBS TV) to develop the first Indigenous history for Australian national television. The series was six years in the making but it is important to remember that *First Australians* (2008) was conceived in an atmosphere of heated ideological debate about Aboriginal history. Perkins has commented that she and the series’ co-producer Darren Dale felt the full weight of the responsibility of getting their series “right” for future generations (2008, 26). She has also admitted that in the beginning they had no idea what shape this history should take (2008, 27). She and Dale

consulted widely, including with Gordon Briscoe, the first Australian Indigenous scholar to be awarded a PhD in history. Like many other historians, Briscoe contributed to debates in the history wars, but he has also been critical of the ways in which the battles have been fought. For example, in a generally favourable review of non-Indigenous historian Bain Attwood's *Telling the Truth About Aboriginal History* (2005), Briscoe acknowledges the book's important contributions to debates about Aboriginal historiography. However he concludes his review with a simple yet nevertheless pointed statement: "But the problem of Aboriginal perspectives remains" (Briscoe, 2006, 28).

Briscoe's remark refers to the problematic lack of opportunity for Indigenous perspectives in Aboriginal written histories while also raising a wider question about what constitutes an Indigenous perspective. Tony Birch has addressed this issue in a highly original analysis of the history wars in which he describes much of the later period as "waging a war around the footnote" (Birch, 2006, 26). Birch argues that while it is true that historian Keith Windschuttle viciously attacked the work and reputations of non-Indigenous historians, the most sustained attack by conservative anti-"black arm-band" critics was targeted at ordinary Indigenous men and women, challenging the credibility and honesty of their testimonies in *Bringing Them Home*. Conservative arguments against the findings of the enquiry hinged on the idea that a traumatised subject cannot be a reliable historian, a line of argument that (wrongly) asserts that all Indigenous people, by nature of the trauma of their historical dispossession, are incapable of historical speech and witnessing. Furthermore, Birch argues that the focus on footnotes in the history wars has contributed to a destructive disconnect between past and present events, that is, historians "waging a war around the footnote" (Birch, 2006, 26) while failing, in his words, "to recognise the impact of on-going denials of a history of state violence on young Indigenous people in Australia today" (Birch, 2006, 26). Birch's critique suggests that an Indigenous perspective on Australian history has the potential to disrupt prevailing narratives and logics of non-Indigenous historiographies by prompting people to make connections between past and present forms of colonialist racist violence. From this we can conclude that an Indigenous perspective on the past originates not solely in identity-being Indigenous—but in Indigenous forms of critical reflection on the ways in which a history of colonial violence continues to impact on Indigenous people's being, that is their opportunities and choices in life, and on their culture and land. As Perkins argued in a key note address in 2006, "Documentary research and the archives", the history wars "are not just being fought in