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*History and Australia: a foundational past?*

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In 1988, former Labor minister, Barry Jones, attended several of Manning Clark's occasional lectures at various locations to commemorate the Bicentenary of British settlement in Australia. As Jones recalled, Clark would read from his small blue notebooks as he spoke about the transmission of European knowledge and culture to the 'ancient', southern continent. On one occasion, Jones remembered how Clark noted that the inventory of the First Fleet included a fortepiano, kettledrums, horns and some stringed instruments. Clark concluded his remarks, said Jones, 'with a rising inflection and a touch of triumph: "And so," Manning exclaimed to his audience, "the music of Mozart came to Australia"'. After the lecture, Jones congratulated Clark but queried him on the Mozart claim. 'I didn't think that we had a comprehensive record of what music was brought out on the First Fleet. Do you know what Mozart works were on hand?' 'Manning looked uncomfortable', thought Jones, 'but he replied swiftly'. 'We don't know what works were involved', Clark responded, 'but it is a reasonable assumption that Mozart's music was brought out. After all, he was well known in London, and published there well before the First Fleet left in May 1787, so there is no reason why it could not have been brought'.

Clark had no evidence that Mozart's music came with the First Fleet but he found the image too evocative to resist. Renowned for his factual accuracy, Jones decided to check. He found that in the same month the First Fleet sailed for Australia, the first edition of *The Times*, under the

heading 'New Music', published two advertisements by the publishers Longman and Broderip offering, *inter alia*, scores for three symphonies and a set of quartets by Haydn, two symphonies, the six quartets Mozart dedicated to Haydn, and the harpsichord quartets by Mozart. Perhaps Clark was right, yet as Jones remarked, it was still 'a heroic assumption'. The image of Phillip and the convicts arriving with the score of a Mozart concerto or string quartet stored in one of the chests piled on the sand at Sydney Cove in 1788 added an irresistible gravitas and grandeur to the occasion.

Gravitas and grandeur were two things Clark pined for above all else in the writing of history. Like many of his generation on the Labor Left, he felt their absence in Australia, a nation that had not been brought into being through a declaration of independence or revolutionary war, but had achieved its independence in piecemeal fashion from Britain, and still hesitated to declare itself a republic.<sup>i</sup> After spending much of the last seven years researching and writing Manning Clark's biography, I've found myself increasingly drawn to one question that preoccupied him for much of his writing life; the contemporary resonance of Australia's foundational history – that is, our historical narratives of national origin and formation - the nation's creation stories.

Clark made no secret of his mission in writing his epic six-volume history of Australia, published between 1962 and 1987. He wanted to discover our identity. He saw his life's work as an unashamedly nationalist project. Not nationalist in any narrow or bellicose sense, but, like many historians of his generation, nationalist in that he believed the writing of history should serve the purpose of national cohesion, providing a bedrock of stories which would actually explain the nation to itself, and perhaps even invent a foundational history.<sup>ii</sup>

Since the first volume of Clark's *A History of Australia* was published in 1962, our public culture has been racked by intense, polarised debates over the nature of Aboriginal dispossession, the potential loss of our British heritage and the legacies of White Australia. What began in the 1960s as an attempt to discover Australia's untold story ended in the 1990s as a demand for balance as history became an emblem of national shame or pride. Throughout this period, State and Commonwealth governments, major political parties, writers, artists, intellectuals and the

advertising industry looked to Australian history to provide the pillars of national identity and national unity. Like many other settler societies, we made our history self-consciously, but the question of our foundational history has been an undeniable, and ongoing source of anxiety. We can see this anxiety first, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the sensitivity, shame and embarrassment regarding our convict origins, and later in our discomfort regarding the public remembering of the frontier violence associated with settlement and Aboriginal dispossession. Indeed, the extent of our unease is quite striking when we cast our eyes back over the last decades.

The years leading up to the Bicentenary in the 1980s, the public airing of the Stolen Generations history in the late 1990s, the Centenary of Federation in 2001 and the more recent History Wars, revealed Australia as a nation with a fragile and fiercely contested past, one that has been consigned to state and federal government committees for choreographed celebration, often with extremely limited success. Over the last forty years or so, the question of our foundational history became politicised as never before. The nexus between historians, political parties, the law and nation making became explicit as historians such as Manning Clark, Geoffrey Blainey and Henry Reynolds played a key role in determining rival public and political positions. History was conscripted: either to justify or condemn the nation. We were continually confronted with a series of questions that went to the heart not only of our society's foundation, but also to its moral legitimacy.

Were we settled or invaded? Was there a frontier war? How many died in these wars? Is our possession of this continent, and indeed, our very sense of belonging here, tainted by a sense of illegitimacy? How was it possible for the nation to build a history of honour and pride if its history of settlement was perceived as shameful? And when, in fact, was our nation founded, with the federation of six colonies in 1901 under the British Crown or on the shores of Anzac Cove in 1915?<sup>iii</sup>

At the same time as these questions were being asked, in the years immediately preceding Kevin Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generations in February 2008, our founding history was

spoken of through Christian metaphors of evil, atonement and absolution, the nation personified as a soul stained by sin or a conscience plagued by repressed memories. The media was deluged with stories of the personal tragedies in Aboriginal families caused by the child removal policies of previous governments. Gradually, church groups, State Parliaments and many individual citizens, prompted by the commemoration of Sorry Day every May 27, apologised formally to Aboriginal people. 'Sorry books' were passed around in workplaces and public spaces, filling the public culture with the language of contrition for past transgressions. When Kevin Rudd finally apologised on behalf of the nation, his speech was much more than an apology to the Stolen Generations. In its content and tone, Rudd's speech sounded an admission of responsibility for two centuries of 'mistreatment', a cathartic purging described by the *Sydney Morning Herald* as 'a nationwide emotional release ... a gesture of atonement for the full disastrous history of indigenous relations since 1788'. The Christian spirit of Rudd's speech, with its talk of 'healing', the end of 'denial' and a nation that had been 'wrestling with its own soul', was as much a cry for absolution – for an end to the history anxiety – as it was an acknowledgement of wrongdoing.<sup>iv</sup>

Tonight, by looking at the commemoration of both Australia Day and Anzac Day in recent years, I want to ask whether Australia's history anxiety has finally come to an end in the wake of Kevin Rudd's Apology? But first, I'll begin by offering a personal reflection on what I see as the underlying reason for our history anxiety, the traditional belief that we had no history at all.

The place where I was born in 1959 was barely thirty kilometres from the site of Australia's British foundation in 1788. The colony's first major inland road and railway passed right through it. Like many Australian places, it had no official date of discovery. Beyond Governor Arthur Phillip's dream of a model English village, no religious refugee, political rebel or visionary statesman had uttered guiding words of inspiration regarding the society that would be established there. Rather, it was a place that *came into being*, one that was settled by force, mapped as evidence of frontier expansion, and ultimately flourished in spite of its brutal origins.

In 1791, approximately 450 convicts, who were crammed into a dozen or so makeshift huts, cleared over 200 acres of land there. On his first visit to the area, Watkin Tench noted that ‘six weeks’ earlier, ‘it was a forest’, but now ‘it has been cleared and the wood nearly burnt off the ground by five hundred men’. In the first few years, many of these men died from sickness or fled into the bush. In the allotments they cleared, along the creek’s bank and close-by the many natural lakes to be found there, they planted corn, maize, wheat and barley, expecting no end to years of plenty. This, they believed, would become a shining example of a public farm. Yet well before the decade was out, the settlers were forced to leave many of their fields fallow, the soil, in Governor King’s words, already ‘worn out’ in 1802.<sup>v</sup>

Images of peaceful yeoman farmers soon gave way to the harsher realities of the colony’s first place of exemplary punishment — a place where convicts were yoked to draw the timber they had felled, twenty-five in a gang, and often survived on rations of little more than five ounces of flour a day. In the early 1790s, there were times when as many as seven or eight men could die in one day. Perhaps burdened by the weight of supervising this hastily erected forced-labour camp, the first convict superintendent, the Irishman, Thomas Daveney, drank himself to death. By 1800, the area was the principal convict depot in western Sydney for gangs assigned to work on large properties. This was Toongabbie, meaning in Daruk, ‘a place near the water’. It was Sydney’s third settlement, and the first area in Australia to officially be given an Aboriginal name. Sydney’s second settlement, Parramatta, was established slightly earlier, but was initially given the name of Rose Hill.<sup>vi</sup>

As I later discovered, Toongabbie also had more dubious firsts to its name. The first recorded decapitation of an Aboriginal person took place there, in what would become typical of frontier warfare in Australia: armed settlers pursuing Aboriginal people who had stolen their crops or speared their cattle, in ruthless reprisal killings. The narrative of the so-called ‘Battle of Toongabbie’ in 1794 would be repeated many times over across the Australian frontier.<sup>vii</sup>

Of all this, growing up in Toongabbie in the 1960s and 1970s, I knew nothing; nothing of the area’s Aboriginal history, and aside from stories of the Irish led convict rebellion that began at

nearby Castle Hill and was swiftly crushed in 1804, very little of its settler history. In effect, I grew up in a history-less country. Nonetheless, there were powerful, almost subliminal messages that seeped through. In folk memory, as Grace Karskens has shown us, Toongabbie became a place that was synonymous with torture, tyranny and oppression. This, somehow, was the history that we all knew. We were the inheritors of a tainted, unworthy and dishonourable past. A history of chain gangs and horrid camp conditions, of hangings and floggings, Toongabbie's origins were difficult to celebrate. We recoiled from its past at the same time as we embraced the convicts as victims, reminding ourselves how fortunate we were in our newfound affluence. The richness and complexity of our history remained hidden from view.

Like many post-war families who had made their lives in Australia's burgeoning suburbs, we had little need of the past. The new suburbs were booming with the influx of migrants from southern Europe all eager to get ahead. We looked forward rather than back. The future was certain, almost tangible, the past barely visible. Aside from the hand-painted image of an Aborigine throwing a boomerang that adorned the wooden fruit bowl on my family's kitchen table, and the spear-throwing Aboriginal garden gnome in our neighbour's front garden, the only hint of Toongabbie's Aboriginal past was the sprinkling of Aboriginal street names nearby — Bungaree, Binalong, Binya, Tungara and Barangaroo — names that we wrote on envelopes and read in street directories and phone books without ever once bothering to inquire of their origins.

While my generation was exposed to some Australian history in junior secondary school – the then customary diet of convict woe, intrepid explorers, the sheep's back and bland institutional progress – the history I learnt in my final years of school, and later at university, was that of revolutionary Europe and America, the Great War and Nazi Germany. After all (I thought at the time), what was Australian history compared to this? Convicts seemed no match for idealistic Puritans, while William Charles Wentworth and Henry Parkes didn't quite seem to cut the grade when compared to a Robespierre, a Thomas Paine or a George Washington. Even today, in popular culture, the suspicion still lingers that Australian history is a slight, boring and relatively inconsequential appendage to history's central stage in Europe or America. As a journalist lamented in the early twentieth century: 'Australia has no history to sing of.'<sup>viii</sup>

The idea of Australia as a land without history has proved remarkably resilient. If there is one book waiting to be written, it is the history of this idea: the land without history. For British settlers in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the majority of them blind to the complexity and depth of Aboriginal cultures, Australia's past was, as the explorer James Calder remarked on encountering Tasmania in the 1840s, 'a verifiable blank'. The land had 'nothing to reveal'. In Australia, there was no such thing as 'classical soil'. If history existed, it could not be found in the 'empty' land in which the settlers had arrived, a land without architecture, stories or, as they believed, 'civilization'. Rather, it could only be embodied in memory, story and song; in the objects and family keepsakes that had travelled with them from the mother country, in the literature they read, in the theatre, dance and music they performed and the law, politics and religious rituals they practiced. History was exiled within them, fastened still to the British homelands they had left behind. Today, among the ever-dwindling band of hard-core monarchists, there remains the fear that if Australia became a republic we would suddenly be cut adrift from British history and civilisation and revert to our former state — a barbaric, history-less island at the bottom of the earth.<sup>ix</sup>

When I look back on that cursed history of Toongabbie from which I turned away in my youth, I see now more clearly where my generation fitted in the history of changing attitudes to Australia Day – somewhere between disinterest and disdain. January 26, given the title Australia Day only in the 1930s, has struggled to gain traction as Australia's national day, with public attitudes shifting from apathy and confusion, to the eager, unreflective embrace of a public holiday. Overcoming the convict stain and the Sydney-centred nature of the event has proved extremely difficult.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, successive Commonwealth governments attempted to invent an Australian 'national identity' in order to fill 'the vacuum' left by Britain's departure, either by placing greater emphasis on Australia Day (often clumsily), promoting a new national anthem (often comically), advocating the study of Australian history in schools (often in ad hoc fashion) or funding various initiatives to promote a 'uniquely Australian culture'. James Curran and Stuart Ward have explained how in less than one generation, a society that had been so certain of its British character suddenly found itself 'floundering' for new narratives of nationhood. The country

was confronted with a paradox: A 'new nationalism' needed to be invented at the very moment conventional nineteenth-century understandings of race based nationalism were being challenged.<sup>x</sup>

Throughout all this time, there was an even more intractable problem, one that emerged as early as 1938, when William Cooper, Jack Patten and William Ferguson, leaders of the Aborigines Progressive Association, declared Australia Day a Day of Mourning. 'We, as Aborigines', they protested, 'have no reason to rejoice on Australia's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday. This land belonged to our forefathers ... We have had 150 years of the white man looking after us and the result is our people are being exterminated ... We ask for ordinary citizen rights and full equality with other Australians'.<sup>xi</sup> This fundamental problem, of Aboriginal exclusion, would continue to haunt Australia Day, particularly from the 1970s on. Despite well-meaning efforts to include Indigenous Australians, many Aboriginal leaders refuse to participate in celebrations that take place under an Australian flag that still carries the Union Jack, for them the very symbol of invasion. Only last year, controversy erupted when The City of Sydney Council voted 7-2 to describe British settlement as an invasion. Compromise terms such as 'European arrival' and colonisation were rejected. The decision was widely reported in the British press, often through gritted teeth, while at home, it received criticism from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal spokespersons. In 2009, Australian of the Year, Mick Dodson, called for Australia Day to be moved, but Prime Minister Rudd refused. The division over January 26 has not subsided, however we seem to have found a temporary solution.<sup>xii</sup>

In order to nationalise Australia Day, and circumvent the historical minefield that has long plagued the day, it has recently begun to shift from a day of muted historical remembrance to a day of outright celebration. This new mood – unashamedly brash and confident in its self-congratulatory fervour, is not only marked by the now common sight of flag-waving from cars, mailboxes and private homes flying the national ensign as if they were diplomatic missions, but also by a profound lack of historical reflection.

Last year, I taught Australian History at University College in Dublin. Shortly after I arrived I was asked by the International Students Association to give a lecture on Australia Day. To my surprise, there were over 60 Australian students studying at UCD. I prepared a 40-minute presentation. My talk was advertised to begin at 5pm and was to be followed by a BBQ. On arrival, only the organisers were there. No audience in sight. I waited for an hour or so. Finally, at around ten minutes to 6, the Australian students started turning up, just in time for the BBQ. My talk was cancelled, and I soon found myself drinking a can of Victoria Bitter, sitting next to three students from Queensland, the Australian flag stamped proudly on their cheeks. In the background, the sound of INXS blasted from a set of makeshift speakers.

Explaining the importance of Australia day that same year, Prime Minister Julia Gillard spoke about mateship, and the chance to reflect on Australians' courage and their belief in a fair go for all their citizens. Australia Day she said, 'is a day when we all remember' that we belong to 'the Australian family', that we are 'bound together in a love of country'. It is 'a day to affirm our embrace of this country' and 'the embrace of our fellow Australians'. This is what makes Australia special and unique, Gillard said. Addressing US Congress on the same day, President Barack Obama must have been listening in: 'What sets us apart as Americans' he asked? 'Far greater than party affiliation', said Obama, is that we are all part of the 'American family'. Despite the stereo effect, Julia Gillard's sentiments are virtuous ones nonetheless. But they also point to the way in which Australia Day has now been cut free from its history.<sup>xiii</sup>

Since 1994, when Australia Day has been celebrated consistently as a public holiday every year across the country, and 2000, when the National Australia Day Council moved from Sydney to Canberra, the shift towards ahistorical celebration has been further entrenched. Indeed, the further away from Sydney, the better. Strengthening 'national pride' and promoting 'unity through celebration' are the watchwords of the Council. While it also stresses the need to promote reconciliation and reflect on the historical import of the day, there is no doubting Australia Day's new public face.<sup>xiv</sup> Through the now standard appearance of the Prime Minister at a Citizenship Ceremony and the announcement of the Australian of the Year and the Australia Day honours, the emphasis is very clearly on inclusion, unity, and feeling good about being Australian. Presumably this means not thinking too deeply about our foundational history. Over the last

decade, prime-ministerial and VIP oratory has rarely if ever mentioned the historical elephants in the room: the convicts, British motivations for colonization, the ships of the First Fleet, Governor Arthur Phillip, his officials, the perspective of the Eora and the relations between them and the settlers. In fact, there is hardly any mention of what was done and said on January 26 1788.

Australia Day is in danger of becoming yet another ingenious form of historical forgetting. We risk reinventing January 26 as a *non-historical* day of celebration, disconnected almost entirely from the historical event that gave it birth.<sup>xv</sup> This myopia can also apply to convict history more generally. In July 2010, UNESCO added 11 convict sites, including Port Arthur and Norfolk Island, to the World Heritage List. But some historians and commentators, trumpeting this recognition of our convict history on the world stage as a source of national pride, misunderstood the nature of the UNESCO listing.<sup>xvi</sup> Rather than emphasising the convict sites as Australia's 'national heritage', its criteria for inclusion were necessarily quite different. 'The Australian Convict Sites', said UNESCO, 'present the best surviving examples of large-scale convict transportation and the colonial expansion of European powers ... the establishment of convict settlements simultaneously led to the Aboriginal population being forced back into the less fertile hinterland'. It was the importance of these convict sites as sites of global imperialism that explained their listing, not their contribution to Australia's newfound pride in its convict past.<sup>xvii</sup>

Forgetting the less palatable aspects of foundational history might be a precondition for nationhood, but Australia's embrace of the Anzac legend since the early 1990s also suggests considerable cause for concern. As we draw closer to the centenary of the Anzac landing on April 25 2015, more will be written and said about the Anzacs than any other event in our history. The flood of military history that has taken a steadily larger hold on the shelves of our bookstores will continue unabated. Already, there have been suggestions that Anzac Cove will not be large enough to hold the thousands of Australians who will make the pilgrimage there in three years time. This burgeoning interest in all things Anzac has been described as an organic phenomenon, as if it had occurred naturally, as if the nation had suddenly decided, mysteriously and silently, to follow the bugle's call and honour their fallen ancestors. But of course, the resurgence of Anzac Day is far from organic. How then might we understand it?

First, in light of much of the historical scholarship over the last two decades, it's clear that we can only understand the politics and resurgence of Anzac Day as part of the *international* surge in commemoration of war and military heritage. The 'cult of commemoration', - of battlefield tourism and pilgrims flocking to stand draped in flags at Anzac Cove – *is* part of an international phenomenon. Today, particularly in western nations, there exists a global industry concerned with the commemoration of war. This industry is funded both by states and private corporations, and it has been greatly encouraged by global media corporations and the tourist industry. Commercial, market-driven factors (local, national and international) are crucial to understanding the resurgence of Anzac Day, particularly because they are closely entwined with political and cultural drivers. In Australia, for example, we have recently witnessed government funded school prizes for Anzac essays, promotion of school based activities and rituals for April 25 as the basis for civic cohesion, images of Simpson and his donkey silhouetted onto posters proclaiming Australia's core values and sent to every primary school, increased government funding of 'military heritage' projects both at home and abroad, including site specific building projects on the Gallipoli Peninsula, such as the recent erection of a retaining wall at Anzac Cove. Between now and 2015, millions of dollars of government money will be spent on promoting the Anzac legend. Anzac Day will become, if it is not already, uncontestably Australia's national day. Already, a majority of Australians believe it to be the day the nation was born, our key founding moment.

The political context in which the Anzac resurgence has occurred is also crucial. Governing within an international climate where liberal democratic values are perceived as being under threat, it is surely no coincidence that the emphasis in much of the recent Prime Ministerial language extolling the virtues of the Anzac legend has placed 'values' at the heart of war commemoration. The Anzacs, many Australians believe, went to war not to secure the territorial interests of the British Empire, but to fight for our 'values'. Listening to the Anzac speeches of Prime Ministers John Howard, Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard, and their New Zealand counterparts, Helen Clark and John Key, it appears that war is no longer about territorial, political, economic or strategic ambitions. Rather, past wars are remembered as values' crusades. This reminds us again, that much like Australia Day, Anzac Day has become ahistorical. It too has witnessed a shift *from commemoration to celebration*. The imperial nature of the Gallipoli campaign is airbrushed out or simply overlooked. Far more important is the politically led embrace of a history of melancholy, loss, honour and pride. We go to Anzac Cove not necessarily to

understand its history but to be *moved*. The 'Anzac spirit', a suitably malleable and vague catchphrase if ever there was one, is the perfect vehicle for the propagation of this ahistorical and emotive popular memory. As Americans speak through their founding generation, returning again and again to search for principles that might guide them in the present, so Australians now turn to the sagas of Anzac. War has become the dominant form of historical remembering in Australia's public culture. And yet, as Marilyn Lake, Henry Reynolds, Joy Damousi and I argued in our recent book, *What's Wrong With Anzac?* popular conceptions of war have also become sanitised. Rather than remembering the horror of war, we have used the memory of the Anzacs to *celebrate* Australian values and to inflate our own national pride.<sup>xviii</sup>

Of course, my perspective is different because I'm a historian. Perhaps I expect too much. In the popular memory of Anzac, the *distance* from the past prized by professional historians takes second place to being *present* in the past, to the language of immediacy and recreation. While historians revel in a plurality of histories, the community cries out for one binding and honourable narrative. The primary relationship between the Anzac story and the audience is an *emotional* embrace, one that runs counter to the more critical understanding brought to the past by historians. Yet the more ahistorical the day becomes, the more fanciful some of the rhetoric surrounding it becomes.

Addressing the crowd before sunrise at the dawn service in 2011, Australia's first woman Commander-in-Chief, Governor-General Quentin Bryce, said that Anzac Day was, at its heart, about love. 'Love of every kind', Bryce said, 'Love of nation, of service, of family. The love we give and the love we allow ourselves to receive. To use some words that many of us know: it is the love that is patient and kind, not jealous or arrogant. It rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. And it never fails'.<sup>xix</sup> Bryce's testament is a paraphrase of Corinthians 13.4 the most frequently quoted Biblical passage on love. Ken Inglis's characterisation of Anzac Day as a civil religion has never been more accurate, our Anzac nationalism never been more delusionary and sentimental.<sup>xx</sup>

Few Australians realise just what an exceptional feat we have managed to achieve in establishing the Anzac legend as our most important myth of national formation. As my

colleague at the University of Sydney, Robert Aldrich, explained to me recently, other nations certainly draw on places outside their territory to establish myths of origin, such as the Polynesians' idea of having come from the mythical island (or perhaps one of the real islands) of Hawaiki. Christian countries base their morals, and sometimes politics on the history of Palestine, Buddhist countries on what happened in Northern India. Then there are myths of national foundation such as the fourteenth century battle of Kosovo, which formed the basis of Serbia's founding myth and helped to fuel its belligerent claims over Kosovo six hundred years later. Caribbean nations often refer back to Africa for elements of their national mythology, and not only because of the transport of slaves, while many countries have asserted claims on foreign territories on the basis of earlier historical association and occupation. But while these examples bear traces of similarity, none quite parallels what Australia, over the last two decades, has managed to do with the Anzac legend, a postcolonial nation effectively creating a myth of national foundation not on its own soil, but fifteen thousand kilometres offshore in Turkey. In the surfeit of Anzac literature, we frequently fail to ask the most important question of all? Why have we rushed to embrace Anzac Day as our key founding myth? Why has this happened and why now? And what are the consequences for the nation now that we have claimed Anzac as our key founding myth?

Even in New Zealand, the country that bears most direct comparison to Australia, the placement and emphasis of the Anzac legend in national mythology is fundamentally different. Former long-serving Labor Prime Minister Helen Clark frequently described Anzac as 'a defining stage in the *evolution* of NZ as a nation' ... and an important piece, she said, 'in the *mosaic* that makes up the picture the world sees when it thinks of NZ'.<sup>xxi</sup> One reason that New Zealand can more easily see the Anzac legend as merely *one part* of the mosaic of its national identity is that in Waitangi Day, it possesses an alternative founding moment. Here, for example, is a text from the Museum of New Zealand in Wellington, which was designed between the mid 1980s and the late 1990s, focusing on the roles the Treaty of Waitangi was called upon to play. The Treaty of Waitangi is a living social document. Debated, overlooked, celebrated. A vision of peaceful co-existence, or the cause of disharmony? An irrelevancy, or the platform on which all New Zealanders can build a future? ... The meaning of the Treaty changes depending on who's speaking. Engage with our founding document. Here are a range of voices from past and present. The floor is open for discussion.<sup>xxii</sup> Australia has no comparable historical example of such a founding document or event. Nor is there any immediate likelihood that an alternative narrative such as the declaration

of a republic is about to emerge to rival Anzac Day.

If we take the broadest view possible, and place the resurgence of Anzac Day in the context of our long-standing anxiety over our foundational history, I think the reasons for its embrace become clear. In many ways it is the result of *exhaustion*, a response to the decades long, unresolved debate over the frontier and Aboriginal dispossession. In this light, Anzac Day appears a much more attractive option than the haunted date of January 26; April 25 offers a ready-made (albeit nineteenth century) foundational narrative that gives rise to feelings of honour and pride rather than guilt and shame.

In creating Anzac as a foundational myth of nationhood in exile from the land in which we live, we have turned our eyes from the true site of melancholy and loss in our history, the land itself - and the encounter between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Our emotional investment in Anzac Day has become a kind of substitute mourning for our inability to mourn the dispossession of Aboriginal people. In a very real way, we have continued to circumnavigate the heart of the matter. Our anxiety over our foundational history, therefore, has not come to an end; rather, we have simply found ingenious ways to avoid confronting it.

Shifting the centre of historical consciousness from Britain to Australia has proved to be a slow and traumatic transition. Perhaps the greatest paradox of Australian history, one that we are still grappling with today, is the reality of living in a country possessed of one of the most ancient cultures on earth, which we also think of as young and relatively new. In essence, we are engaged in a continuing struggle to access, comprehend and integrate our Indigenous past, to become accustomed to the idea that antiquity lies not only in Europe or the Middle East, but here, in Australia. Only last year, in the space of a few days, the discovery of Aboriginal tools at a building site in Sydney doubled the date of Aboriginal occupation in the Sydney area from 15,000 to 30,000 years. The depth of Australia's antiquity is only just beginning to reveal itself.

If we are to possess a foundational history, then surely it must be one that does not avert our eyes from our Indigenous past. One that remains a vehicle for remembering two peoples and many cultures, two different ways of seeing the land and the environment, and one that



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incorporates the full history of their relations; of co-operation, of conflict and reconciliation. The Apology alone will not suffice, nor will the turning away of Anzac. There is more than enough history on our own soil. More than enough history to work through, more than enough history to acknowledge, debate - and celebrate.

Mark McKenna, 2012

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>i</sup> Barry Jones, personal communication, September 2010.
- <sup>ii</sup> Mark McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity: the life of Manning Clark*, Melbourne University Press (Miegunyah) 2011.
- <sup>iii</sup> Mark McKenna, 'The History Anxiety', in Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre (eds) *Cambridge History of Australia*, Volume Two, forthcoming 2013.
- <sup>iv</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 February 2008.
- <sup>v</sup> Watkin Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years: a narrative of the expedition to Botany Bay and a complete account of the settlement at Port Jackson 1788-1791*, Library of Australian History, Sydney, 1979, pp.249-50; King quoted in D. Sargeant, *The Toongabbie Story*, Toongabbie Public School, 1964, p.24.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Manchester Times*, September 15 1852 'Transportation Sixty Years ago'; also see Grace Karskens, *Colony: The Colony: A History of Early Sydney*, Allen & Unwin 2009, pp.84-89.
- <sup>vii</sup> Karskens, *The Colony*, pp.456-460
- <sup>viii</sup> *Adelaide Advertiser* 1 February 1907
- <sup>ix</sup> Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, Cambridge University Press 1996, p. 206. See also Mark McKenna, *Looking for Blackfellas' Point: An Australian History of Place*, University of New South Wales Press, 2002, pp.89-93.
- <sup>x</sup> James Curran and Stuart Ward, *Unknown Nation: Australia after Empire*, Melbourne University Press, 2010.
- <sup>xi</sup> *The Abo Call*, April 1938; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 January 1938.
- <sup>xii</sup> Dodson in *The Age*, 26 January 2009. On Sydney City Council, see London's *Daily Telegraph*, 28 June 2011.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Press report of Gillard's 2011 Australia Day speech, <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/australia-day-is-about-mateship-prime-minister-julia-gillard-says/story-e6frf7jo-1225994789411>; for Obama, see *The Guardian*, 26 January 2011.
- <sup>xiv</sup> On Australia Day Council, see <http://www.australiaday.org.au/corporate/about-us/national-australia-day-council.aspx>
- <sup>xv</sup> David Andrew Roberts, '26 January 1788: The Arrival of the First Fleet and the "Foundation of Australia"', in Martin Crotty and David Andrew Roberts (eds), *Turning Points in Australian History*, University of New South Wales Press, 2009, pp.32-47
- <sup>xvi</sup> For example, Babette Smith, 'Australian Convict Sites declared World Heritage', in *The Weekend Australian*, 7-8 August 2010
- <sup>xvii</sup> See David Andrew Roberts and Erik Eklund, 'Australian Convict Sites and the Heritage of Adaptation: The Case of Newcastle's Coal River Heritage Precinct', *Australian Historical Studies*, 43:3, 2012, pp. 363-80; also see UNESCO website, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1306>
- <sup>xviii</sup> Mark McKenna, 'Anzac Day: How did it become Australia's National Day?' in Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *What's Wrong With Anzac?*, University of New South Wales Press 2010, pp.110-135.
- <sup>xix</sup> For the Governor-General's 2012 Anzac day address see <http://www.gg.gov.au/speech/anzac-day-gallipoli-dawn-service>
- <sup>xx</sup> Ken Inglis, 'The Anzac Tradition', *Meanjin Quarterly*, 24, No. 1, Autumn 1965, pp. 25-44; *Sacred Places: War memorials in the Australian Landscape*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Melbourne University Publishing, 2008.
- <sup>xxi</sup> On Helen Clark and New Zealand generally, see Graham Hucker, 'A Determination to Remember: Helen Clark and New Zealand's Military Heritage', *The Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society*, 40:2, 2010, pp.105-118.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Bain Attwood, 'Refounding the Nation: The Treaty of Waitangi and the Museum of New Zealand/Te Papa Tongarewa', forthcoming; also see the Museum of New Zealand's website <http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/Pages/default.aspx>