‘Nothing has changed’: the making and unmaking of Koori culture

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I

‘You get somebody coming in, a foreigner at that, trying to tell us to rename our mountains.’ Bob Stone, Stawell town councillor.¹

IN MARCH 1989 the Victorian Minister for Tourism, Steve Crabb, announced that the Grampians mountain ranges in western Victoria would ‘revert to their Aboriginal name, Guriward’ (which after further research was altered to Gariwerd). Although this initiative came from the Victorian Tourism Commission, and the local Koori community had not yet been consulted, the Minister felt that he could already announce the names that would be ‘restored’: ‘I expect that the Grampians will be known as Guriward, the Black Range as Burrunj, the Glenelg River as Bugara, Halls Gap as Budja Budja, Victoria Gap as Jananginjawi and so on’.²

The local white community did not share these great expectations. An ‘ex-Labor voter’ wrote to Crabb accusing him of engaging in ‘gutter level’ politics, and warned of an electoral backlash: ‘Remember Mr Crabb the tax payer pays your salaries not the lazy, dirty, counter-productive black sector of Australia’.³ The Mayor of Stawell, Peter Odd, claimed that behind the idea was a ‘radical group’ who had forced the proposal on the government. ‘It seems to me more like a little group that can get what it wants like all the minority groups. The government just bows down to them and the government is ruled by the loudest noise all the time.’⁴
Yet no ‘noise’ on the issue had come from the local Koori community. The five Koori communities in the Western District are represented by Brambuk Incorporated, which at the time was constructing the Brambuk Living Cultural Centre in the Grampians National Park. A spokesperson, Geoff Clark, criticised the government’s continuing refusal to consult local Kooris on policies affecting their history and culture. Although he supported the ‘refreshing and positive gesture’ of the name restoration, Clark compared Crabb’s approach with that of a fellow Scot: ‘He and Major Mitchell are guilty of ignoring the Aborigines’ past and present association and ownership of the Grampians area ... over thousands of years’. Clark said that Brambuk ‘would rename important features in the Grampians area with traditional Aboriginal names’, regardless of any government initiatives.

In December 1990, without Steve Crabb’s knowledge, signs carrying Koori names were erected at certain features to coincide with the opening of the Brambuk Living Cultural Centre. Crabb objected; the community, he said, ‘would be entitled to criticise any cost involved in erecting the signs bearing Aboriginal names before an official decision was made’. But Clark insisted that, as ‘rightful custodians’ of the region, Kooris ‘had the authority to erect the signs’. Clark asked: ‘Will Mr Crabb, with his paternalistic attitude, expect those Aborigines among us with dark faces to be selling trinkets/beads and performing corroborees for his tourist industry?’ Brambuk was not opposed to involvement with tourism, but this had to be achieved ‘without exploiting, and without becoming like the exploited’.

The name change had been proposed in February 1985 by archaeologist Ben Gunn, who prepared a document for the Tourism Commission on ‘Recommended Changes to Aboriginal Site Names in the Grampians’. The region contains 80 per cent of Victoria’s identified Koori rock-art sites, and Gunn suggested that these be given more appropriate names in line with the ‘planned promotion of certain sites as public attractions’. He noted that the existing ‘eurocentric descriptive names’ (such as ‘Cave of Ghosts’) could produce ‘inappropriate expectations in visitors ... disappointment or worse, ridicule’. Gunn proposed that Koori names be given to the sites in consultation with ‘the local Aboriginal communities’.

In 1988 an Aboriginal Tourism Survey had alerted the Tourism Commission to the possibility of exploiting the region’s Koori culture and history: ‘Guided tours of Koori sites have the potential to be very successful. The opportunity is there to bring together the product and the potential customers’. Immediately before Crabb’s public announcement in March 1989, Ben Gunn conducted further research into alternative names for the rock art sites, and for natural features of the region. He did not feel that it was neces-
sary to consult with the local Koori community, as he regarded his research as 'an academic exercise, at this stage'.  

The minister's announcement two weeks later, however, was not an 'academic exercise', but a highly publicised media event.

Crabb demonstrated a typical European disregard for the Indigenous people of the area. To display 'art' was good for business, and to tag the sites with Indigenous names confirmed their legitimacy as artefacts of an 'ancient' culture. But it was not seen as necessary to consult the Kooris of the Western District about the marketing of the heritage that they had managed to retain through 150 years of oppression.

Soon after Crabb's announcement, the Tourism Commission appointed Ian Clark, a geographer from Monash University, to prepare a submission to the Victorian Place Names Committee. In his consultations with the groups that form Brambuk, he found that the Koori community regarded the absence of prior consultation as indicating 'a lack of respect and recognition of traditional ownership of the National Park'. As a result, a representative of Brambuk, Lionel Harradine, was appointed to prepare the submission with Clark. The submission made four sets of recommendations:

1. that twenty-one incorrectly spelt Aboriginal place names currently in use be corrected, and that a further ten Aboriginal names be retained;
2. that the use of forty-four known Aboriginal names of features more recently given European names be restored;
3. that the traditional names of eleven places that do not carry European names be adopted;
4. that the more appropriate names conferred on nine rock art sites . . . be formally adopted.

The name restoration met opposition from a variety of groups. The Stawell Shire Council wrote to all local governments in Victoria, and gained wide support from both rural and urban shires. The Victorian Place Names Committee received petitions of protest with 60,000 signatures. The Council of Clans regarded the proposal as a threat to 'Scottish heritage and pioneers'. The Wimmera branch of the National Council of Women claimed that 'Aboriginals' did not 'know anything about the significance' of the rock art. The Balmoral Golf Club was concerned with the effect that the name restoration would have on its greens: 'Our Club is close to the Glenelg River & uses the water for irrigating the course'. A Horsham shire councillor, Don Johns, expressed similar concerns about Horsham's water supply. Bruce Ruxton of the Returned & Services League (RSL) stated the League's position in his inimitable style: 'In no way would we want the name of the Grampians changed to any other name whether it be an Aboriginal name
or what ... There is a real feeling of ill-wind prevailing over this proposal [sic]." In a submission supporting the restoration, the Friends of the Grampians claimed that the League of Rights had manipulated opposition to the proposal, resulting in widespread ‘racist hysteria’.

The aesthetic and tourist value of the rock art sites was also questioned. Many of the sites require protection behind cyclone-wire fencing, as they have been repeatedly desecrated by vandals. Pat Reid of Belhelten Rise Host Farm, Stawell, claimed that visitors to her farm had ‘little or no interest in our Aboriginal pre-history’, and whatever there was ‘dissipates completely upon inspecting Bunjil’s cave (the most significant Aboriginal art site in Victoria)’. E.R. of Mt Waverley wrote directly to Steve Crabb, informing him that in twenty years of visiting the Grampians she has seen ‘not one Aboriginal person’ and only ‘a few miserable rock paintings’. C.S. of Stawell wrote to ‘point out some facts associated with Aboriginal myths of Dreamtime’. He denied a Koori presence in the region (‘no Aboriginals ever entered the Grampians due to evil spirits’) and claimed that the rock art was painted by ‘a French artist who had a great appreciation of Aboriginal art of central Australia’.

Steve Crabb apparently wanted to promote the region as ‘Victoria’s Kakadu’, but this would be difficult to achieve if people expect a replication of Kakadu ‘art’, ignorant of the regionally specific Indigenous culture and history of the Gariwerd area. An officer of the Victorian Archaeological Survey informed visitors to one of the shelters in 1989 that in the past ‘people were disappointed in the art itself. They were expecting something like Northern Territory art’. People not only expected to view the ‘ancient’, but also to see its readily identifiable signifiers, the art of ‘real’ Aborigines.

For visitors to appreciate the art, they must come to respect and appreciate Indigenous culture, both past and present, here in Victoria. An exploitative tourist industry will not achieve this. Denis Rose, a Koori cultural officer from Brambuk, feels that this will occur when the ‘significance of the sites as places of occupation’ is interpreted and understood. The Centre has attempted to do this by erecting signs that explain the spiritual significance of the art, and the Koori history of the area. The signs also inform visitors that ‘if you wish to obtain more information about this site, its art or Aboriginal culture in general, please call at Brambuk in Budja Budja (Halls Gap)’.

Some opponents of the name restoration also ridiculed Koori languages. Old racist slurs resurfaced: ‘Aboriginal names all ... sound the same, and in most cases, the spelling looks the same’. The Western District Farmer claimed that the proposal pandered to ‘pony-tailed basket weavers
and banjo players’, and the chosen names were ‘totally unpronounceable to modern-day black and white alike’.²⁰ Les Carlyon, in Business Review Weekly, complained that he could not ‘pronounce let alone spell’ the chosen names, and was concerned that the proposal was being considered when Victoria was ‘paralysed by billions of dollars of debt’.³¹

The Grampians District Tourist Association strongly opposed the restoration proposal. The Association identified ‘Aboriginal cultural tourism’ as a ‘niche market’ and therefore supported the upgrading of the rock art sites.³² Initially the Association claimed that it wished to promote ‘Aboriginal culture’ in the Grampians, and ‘supported appropriate names for rock art sites and any unnamed features’. Yet it rejected an overwhelming majority of the proposed names. This included the proposed names for rock art sites and previously unnamed features, which would not be acceptable unless they were altered (that is, anglicised) to something ‘easily recognised and pronounced’.³³

This cultural appropriation illustrates the attitude of many tourist operators, who regard Koori culture as a product that can be altered and represented in an acceptable form, as a commodity, but has little or no intrinsic value. The Tourist Association objected to the removal of names such as Mt Lubra and The Piccaninny. It felt that although such terms were ‘possibly racist’ they were ‘not truly offensive as they are in common usage throughout Australia’. Bob Stone agreed: ‘Piccaninny is a tribute to little Aboriginals’, he said.³⁴

Some names were also rejected on aesthetic grounds. Ararat City Councillor Peter Wright stated that names that translated as ‘pig face’, ‘base of spine’ and ‘phlegm’ were ‘not terribly good for a tourist area’.³⁵ Others related to excrement (such as Gunigalg), and ‘would be more suitable for a sewerage treatment works’.

This European aesthetic ignores the relationship between naming and traditional Koori lifestyle. To reject such names is to reject their cultural significance, and to promote corrupt versions of Koori culture is not only appropriation but deception. Brambuk is disappointed that the Place Names Committee rejected some of the names on these grounds, denying the Koori community the opportunity to present and interpret the relationship to land identified in names that narrate spatial organisation.³⁶

If white Australia is to move beyond a superficial appropriation of the Indigenous culture of this country, those in positions of influence—be they government departments, statutory bodies or tourist promoters—have to stop re-presenting Indigenous cultures in this way. If they are motivated by imperial possession, changes will not occur, as the motivation behind possession is the subjugation and control of the ‘other’.
II
Piper carries a pair of handcuffs slung round him as one [black-fellow] must be taken prisoner for the sake of obtaining native names of the places.37

In his spatial history of Australia, The Road to Botany Bay, Paul Carter has written of ‘how little value our culture attaches to names’.38 This is because ‘we’, feeling imperially secure, and ignorant of the presence of another culture and history, see ‘not a historical space’ that may be contested, and may contain multiple histories, but a ‘historical fact . . . as if it was always there’.39 The cultures of Indigenous people are relegated to ‘prehistory’ and the ‘ancient’, allowing only for meta-historical myths, located outside the boundaries of ‘historical facts’, which support imperial domination. As Chris Healy put it, ‘true knowledge of the past was knowledge of white Australia and reserved for white Australians’.40

To name spaces is to ‘name histories’,41 and also to create them. The process is accepted as natural, representing a ‘given’, that this country belongs to and is a white Australia. But this sense of security evaporates when the hidden history of colonial domination and Indigenous subordination is challenged by an attempt to alter the names of spaces.

Attaching names to landscapes legitimises the ownership of the culturally dominant group that ‘owns’ the names. Indigenous names themselves do not constitute a threat to white Australia. Houses, streets, suburbs and whole cities have Indigenous names. This is an exercise in cultural appropriation, which represents imperial possession and the quaintness of the ‘native’. For the colonisers to attach a ‘native’ name to a place does not represent or recognise an Indigenous history, and therefore possible Indigenous ownership.

It is when names are restored to recognise earlier histories and cultures that the threat to ownership occurs. Imperial history cannot recognise the existence of Indigenous histories. A history of dominance is seen as the history of a ‘nation’. An attempt to recognise the history of Indigenous people creates insecurity, paranoia, even hysteria. It ‘wipes out over one hundred and fifty years of [British] history’ and ‘takes away that heritage’.42 Existing names are ‘recommended for consignment to the scrapheap of history’.43 The features themselves can actually vanish: ‘Ayers Rock is no longer’; ‘GRAMPIONS, ARE THEY GONE?’; ‘Familiar places or landmarks . . . would disappear from the map’.44

Many people of the Western District of Victoria cannot accept a Koori presence in the area, either in the past or present. If they do recognise an Indigenous presence, it is one that is long dead. They cannot accept a reality that makes a mockery of the racial theories and racist practices promoted
for 150 years. In protest against the name restoration, B. C., ‘a former Halls Gap resident’, dedicated a poem to Sir Thomas Mitchell:

He battled through the heathery scrub and scaled the frowning wall
To stand at last triumphant, on the topmost peak of all
He named the range the Grampians. Why should we change it then?
That traveller made our history, he and his stalwart men.

Of Mitchell’s feats, and his place in history, she was certain. This was not so of Koori people.

What the Coorie people called the hills we cannot ever know
For they have gone like yesterday, with little left to show.\(^45\)

Many opponents of the name restoration eulogised the nineteenth-century ‘pioneers’ who had ‘developed the land using nothing but their bare hands and crude farm implements’.\(^46\) Peter Wrigglesworth of Blackburn posed a question regarding the Indigenous peoples’ relationship to the land: ‘Did they strive to explore, to overcome danger, to improve their lot?’ His answer: ‘I don’t know. There’s no record. Who cares?’\(^47\)

Even when their presence was recognised, the present Koori community in the district was often regarded as a ‘cultureless remnant’. J. R. of Murtoa rejected the suggestion that the Kooris had ‘some sort of culture’, adding, ‘It’s too late for all this nonsense’.\(^48\) M. W. of Phillip Island asked: ‘How many Western District Aborigines are there anyway? And what have they contributed to the progress of the area over the last fifty years or so? I’d guess, not many and not much.’\(^49\) Philip Lienert of Horsham, in a letter to the *Wimmera Mail-Times*, argued for the need to put a contact history of ‘murder, theft, rape, cruelty and ignorance’ into its proper perspective: ‘At what time in the world’s history has one group of people not done that to another group?’ He claimed that the Indigenous people of Australia were fortunate that they had been colonised by a civilised race: ‘If Great Britain had not colonised Australia then someone else would have—and what would have been the fate of the Aborigines then?’\(^50\)

Lienert is not the first to ask such a rhetorical question. Academic John Mulvaney has also asked ‘a theoretical question but one which must be faced . . . one wonders what French treatment would have been if France had been the occupying power’.\(^51\)

The *Hamilton Spectator* urged Steve Crabb to ‘leave history as it stands’.\(^52\) By this the newspaper meant a dominant history that not only ignored the Koori history of the region, but was also selectively amnesiac concerning the ‘pioneer’ history of the area. It was not a history of a civilised race, but one of ignorance, racism, greed, brutality and dispossession. Those who
want to ‘leave history as it stands’ need to examine their own history with honesty.

III

_Australia is owned and run by white people not black. We took it and have fought several wars to keep it and our freedom._\(^53\)

Popular Australian history has often been written about ‘winners’, who fought battles with the land before conquering it. Control of the Australian landscape is vital to the settler psyche. The victors’ histories falsely parade as the history of Australia. These histories are those of absence: of _terra nullius_. In order to uphold the lie of an ‘empty land’, Europeans have either denied the Indigenous people’s presence, or have completely devalued our cultures. These hegemonic histories take possession of others’ histories and silence them, or manipulate and ‘deform’ them.\(^54\)

This misrepresentation is now being challenged as Indigenous people confront the imperialist fictions that support political domination and racism. This upsets and displaces what Chris Healy has termed ‘the seamless normality [of] a triumphal national history’.\(^55\)

Many Australian histories authenticate themselves by drawing on ‘the available myths and discourses of national character and identity’.\(^56\) These histories often speak of Australia’s ‘pioneer spirit’, where the ‘settlers’ toiled in a harsh and empty land. They celebrate a hybridised Australian male: fiercely independent, but imbued with just enough British heritage to remain above the ‘natives’, who hover around the fringe of such histories, or are disposed of in the ‘prehistory’ of the text.

Within academia, it is true, the debate has moved on. But outside the walls of the universities, where Indigenous people are fighting for land rights, cultural identity and the right to present and interpret our own histories, we are constantly forced to contend with an imperialist history that is really nothing more than ‘a crude apologia for the status quo of the day’.\(^57\) It is a history motivated by cultural and political domination. It disguises its own violence and oppression by presenting sanitised ‘nationalist themes, grown cosy and thoroughly naturalised by repetition, [that] disguise or celebrate the actual history of imperial and colonial domination’.\(^58\)

These histories may not be presented in the pages of a conventional text (although they often are). They parade themselves in the media and on film. They are evoked in political discussion of ‘Aboriginal issues’. It is not surprising that many of these debates centre on the relationship to land.

In Perth, the Swan River Fringe Dwellers, Nyoongar people, have waged a struggle since the early 1990s against developers and the state
government over the Old Brewery site on the Swan River.\textsuperscript{59} They are attempting to protect a sacred dreaming track formed by Waugal, a serpent that created many of the landscape features in the area, including the river. The authenticity of their claim and their culture has been challenged by those who wish to build a recreation and culture centre on the land. Although both the developers and government had difficulty accepting the Nyoongar belief in a ‘giant snake’, it did not stop them from trying to appropriate this creation story for their own purposes. The original design for the redevelopment incorporated a 100-metre-long ‘polychrome brick Waugal path’. The Nyoongars’ right to protect their sacred land is being rejected by a government that attempts to deny their cultural identity. Steve Mickler has called this ‘a colonialist disdain for the fallen “noble savage”, the urban “half-caste”’.\textsuperscript{60}

The simplest way to deny groups such as the Swan River Fringe Dwellers a right to their land is to deny their existence as Indigenous people. If such a denial of identity fails, some opponents revert to the \textit{terra nullius} myth. In a 1991 newspaper article, a Victorian journalist opposed the Uluru name restoration, claiming that the area had been unoccupied by ‘tribes of the desert ... for centuries’, with the exception of ‘nomadic hunters’; who visited the area ‘in prolonged wet seasons’.\textsuperscript{61}

At Echuca in Victoria, the local Yorta Yorta people had remains of their ancestors returned to them by the Museum of Victoria in 1990. The remains had been excavated at Kow Swamp between 1969 and 1972 by archaeologist Dr Alan Thorne. Professor John Mulvaney, a supporter of Dr Thorne, repeatedly claimed that the attempts to have the remains returned to the Koori community for reburial were ‘the actions of a handful of radicals’,\textsuperscript{62} although the campaign to have the remains returned to the community was supported by the nine Aboriginal Land Councils of the Murray River Region, as well as Colin Walker, senior Aboriginal sites officer in the area and representative of the Yorta Yorta people.\textsuperscript{63} Mulvaney and Thorne recognised the scientific value of studying the remains, but denied the historical and cultural relationship that present Koori people have with their ancestors. The remains were no longer a part of Koori history: they had become ‘ancient bones [that] belong to the world—not us’.\textsuperscript{64} Thorne dismissed any ancestral link between Kooris living today and the bodies that he removed from their burial place, on the grounds that there were differences in anatomical features, while Mulvaney was concerned that ‘we could face refusal to excavate any more Aboriginal sites’.\textsuperscript{65}

Europeans continue to ‘make’ and ‘unmake’ Indigenous people. When we attempt to claim rights to land, or to the bodies of our ancestors, we are separated from an ‘ancient past’. Steve Mickler believes that, as the appreciation (and possession) of Aboriginal art has increased, so too has ‘the intensity of the denigration of practised or “lived” Aboriginal culture’.\textsuperscript{66}
This form of racism relates to what Renato Rosaldo has termed ‘imperialist nostalgia’, which makes racial domination appear ‘innocent and pure’. Having altered or destroyed the culture of the ‘other’, the colonisers then appropriate it for their own gain, or even mourn its passing, while at the same time concealing their ‘own complicity with often brutal domination’.  

Historically, Europeans expected to witness the eradication of the Indigenous people of this country, and Australian governments have attempted to erase the identity of Indigenous people by physical or cultural genocide, the latter often parading under the title of ‘assimilation’. Despite their failure, ‘imperialist nostalgia’ is everywhere. The passing of an ancient culture is both mourned and celebrated. The collection of art, for example, can serve as evidence of the superiority of the imperialist culture, while allowing its owners the gratification of appreciating the ‘beauty’ in objects from a past time. James Clifford has noted the Western preference for collectables that are from an ‘ancient (preferably vanished) civilisation’. This is so for art and bodies. For mourning to occur ‘innocently and purely’, without opposition, the possessed and commodified culture must be certified dead.

IV

As much as guns and warships, maps have been the weapons of imperialism.

We should fully recognise what nineteenth-century explorers and ‘pioneers’ accomplished in the Western District. In 1836 Major Thomas Mitchell passed through the land of the Jardwadjali clans in and around the mountain range that he named the Grampians. During this search for exploitable land Mitchell claimed that he was exploring a terra nullius—a no man’s land—despite his having contact with local Indigenous people, some of whom his party murdered. Mitchell wrote: ‘It was evident that the reign of solitude in these beautiful vales was near a close; a reflection which, in my mind, often sweetened the toils ... of travelling through such houseless regions’. He described these houseless regions as an ‘Eden’ awaiting ‘the immediate reception of civilised man’. His second-in-command, Granville William Chetwynd Stapylton, had a fine understanding of the value of their speculative exercise. The area was an ‘El Dorado’ which would be ‘at present worth sixty millions to the Exchequer of England’, and hopefully result in ‘a good fat grant’ for the ‘discoverers’.

Mitchell was a surveyor, taking control of the land by charting it on a map. By naming features, he placed a symbolic British flag on each of them. The land was charted, ordered and labelled, becoming a colonial possession.
Mitchell eulogised his own feats: ‘Of this Eden I was the first European to explore its mountains and streams’. His cartography and favourable reports to the British government resulted in an immediate grab for land. He anticipated that his expedition would lead to the exploitation of ‘those natural advantages [of the land], certain to become at no distant date, of vast importance to new people’.73 Such is the power of cartography.

Mitchell was able to map a ‘socially empty space’.74 Although the land had been occupied for thousands of years, by making a map Mitchell took possession of it for Britain. Elizabeth Ferrier has written that ‘mapping determines the way landscape has been conceived’; it is described as an ‘unfolded map’.75 This is a powerful metaphor. The land that was possessed could literally be held in the hands of the invading colonisers. When Mitchell mapped his ‘Australia Felix’, a land without a recognised people or history was given a history—a British history. His maps conceal the presence and histories of the Indigenous people.

Opponents of the Gariwerd name restoration regarded it as an insult to Mitchell’s ‘memory and tenacity’.76 And although the Koori Tourism Unit’s submission highlighted the fact that Mitchell had only conferred ten of the forty-four European names at issue, it also said that ‘Mitchell should be credited with advocating the retention of Aboriginal place-names’, and had often done so: ‘I have always gladly adopted Aboriginal names’. Steve Crabb, quoting the same passage from Mitchell’s diary, said the explorer went to great lengths to use Koori words when he named landscape features’.77

Although the Indigenous groups of the Gariwerd area followed Mitchell’s party as it moved across the mountain range, they made little contact with him. Mitchell sometimes left the main party and ‘explored’ ahead with a smaller group, leaving Stapynton in charge. When visited by those from whom Mitchell wished to gain both knowledge and names, Stapynton recorded: ‘I wish to detain them if possible until the Surveyor General returns, for by them we may obtain a great deal of knowledge of the intervening country’.78 Piper, a ‘black’ from New South Wales who accompanied the party, carried the handcuffs that would capture the Indigenous names. But Stapynton did not exactly put out the welcome mat:

Blackfellows shot at and wounded today by one of the men in the bush. The native shipped his spear and was accordingly very properly fired at. Now to war with these gentry I suppose. They are encamped around us tonight. Tomorrow we will give them a benefit if they don’t keep off.79

Stapynton entered comments in his diary in reference to the Indigenous peoples: ‘Their hollow resembles precisely the cry of some wild beast, which in fact it is’.80 On one occasion he disturbed a family who appear to
have been hunting. He took great pleasure in the fear that he apparently
instilled in them: 'These devils will always run if you give them the time'.

This is the man after whom Mitchell named Mt Stapylton. It was this
feature that the Victorian Place Names Committee refused to restore to
Gunigal, apparently on aesthetic grounds.

In May 1836, north of what is now the Murray River, Mitchell’s party
had clashed with Indigenous groups. On 27 May Mitchell decided to take
action 'in a war which not my party, but these savages had virtually com-
 menced'. Mitchell set up an 'ambuscade' in order to surprise 'the vast body
of blacks' that had been tracking the party. Realising that Mitchell’s men
were waiting for them, the group ran toward 'their citadel', the river.
Without waiting for an order from Mitchell, his men ran after the 'blacks',
shooting them as they attempted to escape across the river. Mitchell later
reported that seven had been shot. He accepted fully the decision of his men
to chase and kill, 'for the result was the permanent deliverance of the party
from imminent danger'. Mitchell commemorated the killings by conferring
a name upon the site: 'I give to the little hill which witnessed this over-
throw of our enemies, and was to us the harbinger of peace and tranquility,
the name of Mt Dispersion'. The massacre created enough 'ripples' to
delay Mitchell's knighthood.

To ensure that Mitchell’s place in history is remembered, there are
some fifty memorial cairns dotted along a commemorative track bearing his
name. This celebration of a 'great explorer' buries the dead and their his-
tories. As Chilla Bulbeck has shown, 'most monuments avoid the sore spot
of race relations'.

Mitchell’s exploration of the Western District had been pre-empted by
the land-hungry Henty brothers, who occupied land at Portland Bay in
1834. The way to gain free title to land was to exploit it vigorously. A
claim was established by 'occupying it with sheep grazed in flocks from 500
to 1000 head, each flock in the care of a shepherd'. This had a devastating
effect on the Indigenous population. When the Chief Protector of Abori-
gines, G. A. Robinson, arrived in Portland in May 1841, he discovered that
only '2 of the tribe who once inhabited the country of the Convincing
Ground are still alive'.

Robinson’s tour of the Western District uncovered large-scale murder
by the European squatters, as well as Koori resistance. At Portland the Police
Magistrate, Mr Blair, stated that the 'natives' of a 'tribe' that had killed a
squatter and his shepherd 'should be exterminated'. He would 'shoot the
whole tribe' if the murderer was not 'delivered up'. Two days later, one of
the Henty brothers informed Robinson that 'the settlers were dropping
them'. Blair, who was present, 'replied he hoped so', and added that 'he had
no power to restrain the settlers from shooting the women and children'.
At the Fitzroy River near Portland, a Mr Pilleau informed Robinson that ‘the settlers encouraged their men to shoot the natives’, and ‘that for every white man killed 20 blacks were shot’. Robinson recorded that the settlers spoke of ‘dropping the natives as if they were speaking of dropping cows. Indeed, the doctrine is being promulgated that they are not human, or hardly so and thereby inculcating the principle that killing them is no murder.’ He received information of the murder of two Koori women and a boy, who had been lured to their death with the promise of food. Other women were abducted, raped and beaten. On 26 June 1840 he was informed that ‘an old woman’ named ‘Nar.re.r burnin’ had been murdered at John Henty’s outstation. She had been ‘shot, kicked, and stabbed with a bayonet several times . . . and then buried in the ground’.

At the Tulloch property near the Grampians, Robinson ‘saw the corpse of a native on 4 sticks’, apparently used as bait to lure and kill emus. Robinson despaired at ‘the heartless manner in which Charles Winter and his ruffians [reacted to] the barbarous murder of this man’. Tulloch told Robinson that he and eight other men had previously gone to the Grampians ‘in quest of blacks’. They found a child, laid it near the fire ‘and roasted it or, to use his qualified expression, burnt it’. They also found a ‘fine little boy’, who bit one of the men who had abducted him. ‘The ruffian then kicked the child to death.’ A week later, following yet another attack on a native camp near Mt Sturgeon, Robinson could only state the obvious: ‘[This] would not be allowed in civilised society’.

In denying a Koori history, the people of the Western District have also conveniently denied their own history. This is a form of radical conservatism: the history is not unknown, but is repressed by building monuments to murderers. When this kind of façadism is threatened with exposure, the response is hostility and hysteria.

On 15 October 1991 Steve Crabb announced the Place Names Committee’s decision on the name restoration. Forty-nine place-name restorations were accepted, fifteen were rejected and four required further investigation. Most of the accepted names were given dual Koori/English names. The Koori Tourism Unit had publicly accepted this position during negotiations at least a year earlier: ‘We have no objection so long as the Koori name goes first’. But this did not happen. The National Park will be officially known as The Grampians (Gariwerd). The Koori name is therefore linguistically subordinated, ‘handcuffed’ in parentheses.

The local member for Lowan, Bill McGrath, promised that the names would be ‘thrown out . . . as soon as the [Liberal Party] Opposition was returned to Government’. Bob Stone, now Stawell’s mayor, said that ‘you won’t have anyone around here using the names’. He believed that the signs would most likely be torn down, adding, ‘I wouldn’t do it myself, as
much as I’d like to’.\textsuperscript{101} Geoff Clark of Brambuk, on the other hand, felt that on its own the name restoration was ‘a poor attempt at some form of social justice’, and would only amount to something of substance when ‘the concept of land ownership [and] recognition of our cultural heritage within this particular area is recognised’.\textsuperscript{102}

The name restoration may be a beginning or an end. The tourist dollar chases the ‘niche market’. The marketers may one day target a Western District town as a ‘Sovereign Hill’\textsuperscript{103}—perhaps Stawell, which has a gold-mining history. Its citizens may become artefacts, performing behind colonial facades, stuck in a local version of ‘American Dreams’.\textsuperscript{104} But if the market moves away from ‘Dreamtime legends’, the money may as well.

Koori culture is not a commodity. It must be interpreted in an educative fashion by those who live it—Koori people. To assist in this process the Koori names of landscapes in the region should be fully restored, not presented in a tokenistic fashion, or as a ‘dead tongue’.\textsuperscript{105}

The first publication to promote the newly named Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park informs us that ‘there’s a place in Victoria where time seems to have stood still. A place of Dreamtime legends’. The booklet tells of the Kooris, who ‘roamed’ the area, the coming of Mitchell, then the squatters, ‘the farmers, the foresters, and the miners’.\textsuperscript{106} It asks tourists to visit Brambuk Living Cultural Centre, or possibly the ‘Grand Canyon ... Fallen Giant ... Whale’s Mouth ... Jaws of Death’. Visitors to the park can experience ‘the same panoramic views Major Mitchell marvelled at in 1836. Nothing has changed.’
Fresh Evidence, New Witnesses: Finding Women's History; Saunders and Evans (eds), Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation; Sheridan, Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race and Nation in Australian Women's Writing; Curthoys, 'The privilege of being Aboriginal'; Magarey et al. (eds), Debutante Nation: Feminism Confronts the 1890s; McGrath, 'Beneath the skin: Australian citizenship, rights and Aboriginal women'; McGrath, 'Black velvet: Aboriginal women and their relations with white men in the Northern Territory, 1910–1940'.

3 See Reynolds, The Other Side of the Frontier: An Interpretation of the Aboriginal Response to the Invasion and Settlement of Australia; Reynolds (ed.), Race Relations in Northern Queensland; Reynolds (compiler), Dispossession: Black Australians and White Invaders; Reynolds, With the White People.

4 See Ryan, 'Aboriginal women and agency in the process of conquest: a review of some recent work'; Ryan, 'Reading Aboriginal histories'.


6 See Cowlishaw, Black, White or Brindle: Race in Rural Australia; Cowlishaw, 'Introduction: representing racial issues'; Cowlishaw and Morris (eds), Race Matters: Indigenous Australians and 'Our' Society.

7 See Lattas, 'Aborigines and contemporary Australian nationalism: primordiality and the cultural politics of otherness'; Lattas, 'Essentialism, memory and resistance: Aboriginality and the politics of authenticity'.

8 In the arena of life-writing see for example Rita Huggins and Jackie Huggins, Auntie Rita; Nannup with Marsh and Kinnane, When the Pelican Laughed; Ward, Wandering Girl; Ward, Unna You Fullas; West, Pride Against Prejudice: Reminiscences of a Tasmanian Aborigine; Roughsey, An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New.

9 Butler, Excitable Speech: a Politics of the Performatve.

10 Better

1 See Foucault, Technologies of the Self: A Seminar.

2 See National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy: Joint Policy Statement.

3 Haddon et al., Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits.

4 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 44.

5 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 44–5.

6 Haddon et al., Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits.

7 See 'Foreword' in National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy: Joint Policy Statement, p. 5.

8 Lourde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches, p. 44.

11 'Nothing has changed': the making and unmaking of Koori culture

1 Melbourne Sun, 27 March 1989.

2 Ibid.

3 Koori Tourism Unit file 9/7/7/6/3.


5 Editor's note: The five communities are: the Framlingham Aboriginal Trust, the Kirrae Whurrong Community, Horsham Aboriginal Cooperative (Goolum Goolum Community), Warrnambool Aboriginal Cooperative (Gunditjamara Community) and the Windemara Community.

6 Editor's note: The Brambuk Living Cultural Centre was officially opened in 1990 and commenced commercial operation in 1991. The Centre continues to serve the public as the main source of historical information and cultural knowledge representing the five Koori communities in the Gariwerd/Grampians area of the Western District (see note 5 above).

7 Press release by Geoff Clark, Chairperson, Brambuk Incorporated, 29 March 1989, Koori Tourism Unit file 9/7/7/6/3.
Melbourne Herald Sun, 11 December 1990.
Koori Tourism Unit file 12/2/6/3.
Koori Tourism Unit file 9/7/7/6/3.
Victorian Tourism Commission, A Submission to the Victorian Place Names Committee—The Restoration of Jardwajjali and Djab wurrung Names for Rock Art Sites and Landscape Features in and around the Grampians National Park, 1990, p. 5.
This and the following letters are from Koori Tourism Unit file 9/7/7/6/3.
Koori Tourism Unit file 9/7/7/6/3, 2 November and 28 July 1989.
A copy of this submission is in Koori Tourism Unit file 12/2/6/3.
Koori Oral History Program, Grampians Visit, 1 June 1989, tape 46.
Portland Observer, 9 July 1990.
Koori Tourism Unit file 12/2/6/3, 10 October 1990.
Ibid., 9/7/7/6/3, 10 May 1989.
Interview with Ian Clark, 21 October 1991.
Koori Oral History Program, Grampians Visit, 1 June 1989, tape 46.
Ibid.
Wimmera Mail-Times, 22 June 1990.
Western District Farmer, June 1990.
Koori Tourism Unit file 12/2/6/3.
Grampians District Tourist Association, Submission to the Victorian Place Names Committee, 26 September 1990. By anglicised I mean corrupted, as was the case with some existing names, such as Cherrypool for Djarubul.
Melbourne Sunday Herald, 3 June 1990.
Ararat Advertiser, 31 May 1990.
Interview with Ian Clark. Clark stated that the Place Names Committee also rejected Bugara: not because of any distasteful translation, but because it sounds ‘too much like bugger’.
Carter, The Road to Botany Bay, p. 2.
Ibid., p. xiv.
Healy, ‘We know your mob now’—histories and their cultures’, p. 512.
The phrase is Paul Carter’s. See Carter, ‘Travelling blind: a sound geography’.
R. S. of Stawell, 7 April 1989, in Koori Tourism Unit file 9/7/7/6/3.
Hamilton Spectator, 22 December 1990.
Koori Tourism Unit file 9/7/7/6/3, 31 January 1990.
P. N. Griffin, in Stawell Mail-Times (undated cutting).
Melbourne Sun, 19 April 1989.
Koori Tourism Unit file 9/7/7/6/3, 10 April 1989.
Ibid., 18 December 1990.
Wimmera Mail-Times, 22 June 1990.
Hamilton Spectator, 13 May 1990.
Clive Johnson, Wimmera Mail-Times, 8 June 1990.

Healy, “We know your mob now”—histories and their cultures”, p. 512.

Graeme Turner, National Fictions.

Frances and Scates, ‘Honouring the Aboriginal dead’, p. 72.


Petersen, ‘Rock robbery’.

See for example The Australian, 21 August 1990.

Media release, Murray River Region Aboriginal Land Council, 22 August 1990; The Age, 3 August 1990. At the time Colin Walker had recorded 160 protected sites, and ‘knew of many more’.


Ibid.


Rosaldo, ‘Imperialist nostalgia’.

Clifford, The Predicament of Culture, p. 222.


Ibid., p. 171.


On which see Hartley, ‘Maps, knowledge and power’.

Elizabeth Ferrier, ‘Mapping power: cartography and contemporary cultural theory’, p. 41.

For example, D. S. of Bentleigh, 30 March 1989, in Koori Tourism Unit file 9/7/7/6/3.

Warrnambool Standard, 1 December 1990.


Ibid., p. 95.

Ibid., p. 100.

Ibid., p. 105.


Manning Clark, ‘Major Mitchell and Australia Felix’, p. 79.

Ibid., p. 76.

Bulbeck, ‘Aborigines, memorials and the history of the frontier’, p. 170. See also Frances and Scates, ‘Honouring the Aboriginal dead’.


Peel, ‘The first hundred years of agricultural development in Western Victoria’.


Ibid., p. 132.

Ibid., p. 27.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 43.

Ibid., p. 75.

Ibid., p. 74.

Ibid., p. 77.

Ibid., p. 87.


Courier, Ballarat, 20 October 1990.

Editor’s note: More than a decade later, this remains the case at the time of republication of this essay in 2003.


Vox Populi, Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), 28 October 1991. This had occurred earlier in 1991 when a sign was erected at the newly named Yanga Nyawi National Park in the
Mallee (Wimmera Mail-Times, 14 October 1991). It has since occurred in the newly named national park (The Age, 14 December 1991).

102 Ibid.

103 Editor’s note: Sovereign Hill, in Ballarat, is a tourist attraction re-presenting the days of the nineteenth-century gold rush in Central Victoria.

104 See Peter Carey, ‘American dreams’ in his The Fat Man in History.


12 Australia’s Indigenous languages

1 Editor’s note: This figure refers to funding levels at the time this essay was first published in 1994.

13 Overturning the doctrine: Indigenous people and wilderness—being Aboriginal in the environmental movement

1 Editor’s note: the Hindmarsh Island Bridge saga began in the mid-1990s when private developers proposed to build a bridge connecting the South Australian mainland with Hindmarsh Island in order to support a proposed tourism and leisure complex. Members of the Ngarrindjeri community maintained that the island included sites relating to sacred women’s business, although this was disputed by other Ngarrindjeri women who claimed connection with the territory covered by Hindmarsh Island. The proposal for the Hindmarsh Island Bridge became the focus of national political debate and controversy; a Royal Commission into the Hindmarsh Island case began in July 1995 and the Commission handed down its findings—which allowed the building of the bridge to go ahead—in December 1995. However, a series of legal challenges to the bridge delayed its opening until 4 March 2001.

2 Editor’s note: This refers to the period following the introduction of native title in 1993. See also note 3 below.


4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, The Mabo Judgement, pp. 1–8.

5 Bartlett, The Mabo Decision, p. 41. The Mabo Decision contains the full text of the decision in Mabo v. Queensland with a commentary by Bartlett.

6 See Native Title 1993: Legislation with Commentary by the Attorney General’s Legal Practice, p. 104 ref. (s 223 [1]).

7 Whitelock, Conquest to Conservation, p. 12.

8 Central and Northern Land Councils, ‘Our land is our life—the Australian economy through a number of avenues’, Our Land, Our Life: Aboriginal Land Rights in Australia’s Northern Territory, p. 15.


10 Ibid.

11 Toyne and Johnston, ‘Reconciliation, or the new dispossession’, p. 9.

12 Editor’s note: Joh Bjelke-Petersen was Premier of Queensland between 1968–87.


14 See Horstman on the ‘Yarrabah agreement’ in his ‘Cape York Peninsula: forging a black-green alliance’.

15 See Toyne and Johnston, ‘Reconciliation, or the new dispossession’, p. 9.

16 Ibid., pp. 8–10.

17 Editor’s note: The Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park was handed back to its Aboriginal owners in 1985. See McEvoy and Lyon, The Land is Always Alive: The Story of the Central Land Council. Kakadu National Park in northern Queensland was established in 1979. The park was awarded to Aboriginal people by Justice Fox as part of the Northern Territory’s first land