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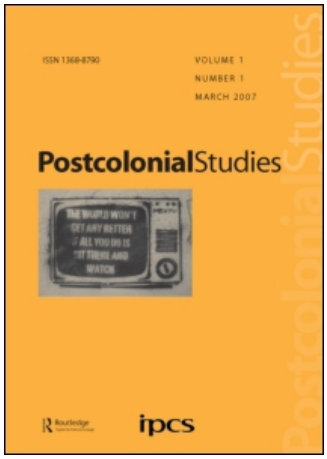

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Historylessness: Australia as a settler colonial collective

LORENZO VERACINI

Most cabbies would confirm that 'Australia has little history'. This is remarkable; how can one explain this often repeated trope? While having 'little' history should be understood in the sense that Australia has a short chronology (as dialogically opposed to 'Old Europe', for example), this refrain could also be understood as a way of expressing a perception that Australia is, relatively speaking, an especially 'historyless' society. This article understands a recurring reference to a lack of a 'dense' past as one discursive feature related to a number of specific constraints typical of settler colonial ideological formations.

Perceiving a lack of history, a lack of conflict, and a classless circumstance are related. As well as historyless (and despite contradicting evidence) Australia has a long tradition of being represented as an exceptionally egalitarian and classless society (again, as dialogically opposed to 'Old England'). A classless political order would be characterised by a lack of conflict that would in turn produce no history. This article interprets this claim as another discursive feature typical of settler colonial rhetorical traditions. Mythologies about egalitarian societies inhabiting 'quiet' continents, and the reality of underdeveloped historiographies, are related to the long lasting resilience of a settler colonial consciousness. The first section of this article outlines an approach to the historical consciousness of settler colonial political traditions; the second section focuses on Australian historiographies.

History and 'settler society'

Settler colonial political traditions have recurrently imagined a settler collective as the establishment of a worldly 'city on the hill': a locale where history could and had to be abandoned as a way of organising a regenerated body politic (religious zealots establishing themselves in New England recurrently construed their migration as 'rebirth'). An ideal society built elsewhere had to validate a specific representation of a traditional world by anti-politically leaving Old World history behind. In the context of an Anglophone tradition of settler colonialism, it was an idealised and 'pristine countryside cast timelessly in the early 18th century', as epitomised by Wordsworth's 'perfect Republic of Shepherds and Agriculturalists', and by rhetorical representations of 'the fall of the yeomanry'.[1] Images of

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neotraditional futures informed other national approaches to settler colonial practice. It was the 'intense desire to construct a preindustrial, agrarian vision of Germany', for example, that informed policies aiming at creating a new/old Germany in South West Africa.[2] And yet, a settler society is especially a society 'to come', where tradition and new beginnings would necessarily be closely intertwined. Nietzsche's warning against antiquarianism and against an insistence on new departures is especially appropriate in the case of settler colonial regimes.[3]

A settler anthropological revolution had to produce social collectives entirely projected towards the future and express a determination to reject historical and political precedents (while at the same time re-establishing new/truer traditional forms). As a result, forgetting can be understood as one trait of settler colonial collectives. Indeed, historical oblivion is one structural feature of the settler colonial mind. On this point, historiographer Eviatar Zerubavel, author of *Time Maps*, quotes Berl Katznelson, one 'of Zionism's leading visionaries':

> we cultivate oblivion and are proud of our short memory. ... And the depth of our insurrection [in Zionist parlance: settlement] we measure by our talent to forget. ... The more rootless we see ourselves, the more we believe that we are more free, more sublime. ... It is roots that delay our upward growth [in Israeli parlance: settlement].[4]

Patrick Wolfe, on the other hand, has perceptively detected settler colonialism's propensity for 'selective amnesia' and 'solipsistic narratives':

> This kind of selective amnesia would seem to be particularly congenial to settler-colonial nationalism. After all, settler colonialism strives for the elimination of the native in favour of an unmediated connection between the settlers and the land—hence the notion of building clone-like fragments of the mother country in the wilderness. In this fantasy, nobody else is involved, just settlers and the natural landscape. Such a situation is clearly conducive to solipsistic narratives.[5]

In settler colonial contexts, however, a rhetorical reference to lack of history coexists with a competing—and equally recurring—reclamation of history, and an enhanced attention to the marking of a new experience (US historian Edmund S Morgan defined Puritan New England as a 'most self-conscious society') is often associated with a corresponding need to reject existing political and historical orders.[6] While the tension between the prospect of establishing *another* society (a new Europe endowed with its unbroken history) and the possibility of a society that is *other* (a social experiment capable of leaving history behind) is indeed a recurring feature of settler colonial political traditions, the establishment of a settler polity is recurrently framed in terms of a civilising effort.

As well as being negated, 'history' becomes at the same time a crucial legitimising marker in the struggle against Indigenous people (who are perceived as having none) and against the possibility of degeneration in frontier conditions (ongoing anxieties about the possibility of Europeans 'going native' and thus rejecting their 'history' are always part of a settler

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cultural horizon).[7] Frantz Fanon wrote authoritatively about the ways in which a reference to history is one fundamental refrain of colonial and settler colonial discourse:

> The settler makes his history; his life is an epoch, an Odyssey. He is the absolute beginning: 'This land was created by us'; he is the unceasing cause: 'If we leave, all is lost, and the country will go back to the Middle Ages'. Over against him torpid creatures, wasted by fevers, obsessed by ancestral customs, form an almost inorganic background for the innovating dynamism of colonial mercantilism.
>
> The settler makes history and is conscious of making it. And because he constantly refers to the history of his mother country, he clearly indicates that he himself is the extension of that mother country. Thus the history which he writes is not the history of the country which he plunders but the history of his own nation in regard to all that she skims off, all that she violates and starves.[8]

This displacement—being somewhere and making the history of another locale—underscores a somewhat distorted relationship with history that is typical of a settler colonial state of mind.

The founding texts of settler political traditions outline the establishment of a body politics that operates in a historyless reality. Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, for example, focuses on the encounter between a settler group and the exceptional geography it settles (a scenario that facilitates the establishment of an agrarian society of equals). It narrates the unique combination of a land that is unframed by social relations (a wilderness waiting to be cultivated) and a settler collective (which is also assumed to be divested of any prior social determination): a people without history in a place without history.[9] Moreover, as Ayse Deniz Temiz's outline of his account of a settler foundation remarks, the 'transition from the state of nature to the social state is incomparably smoother in Tocqueville's exceptional case' (as opposed to the Hobbesian transfer of power to the sovereign, or Rousseau's social contract).

> [The] state of law does not rule out the natural state, but emerges alongside it. For the law does not arise as a collective response to a conflict which it takes upon itself to dissipate, rather it emerges spontaneously, so to say, as supplement to a conflict-free natural state.[10]

Tocqueville's assertion of a non-detectable shift from a state of nature responds to Locke's notion that 'in the beginning all the world was America' (it is 'settlement' that supersedes a natural state, and it is an original settler appropriation—enclosure—that defines and precedes the inception of historical processes).[11] Despite their differences, both Locke and Tocqueville assumed that settlers are natural men engaged in building a settled life in ahistorical locales.

On the other hand, a need to break away from historical orders is a recurring feature of debates pertaining to the establishment of settler polities. In his analysis of settler colonialism Anthony Moran notes how what he defines as a discourse of "newness" was the 'staple of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century settler nationalists', proclaiming that 'settler colonies

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or nations were new societies free of the problems, the traditions and the class distinctions that bedevilled the "old world"', that the "'absence" of history and tradition meant that settlers could build their own utopias without hindrances'.[12] This is a long lasting and widely held notion shared, among others, by Malthus, Tocqueville and Marx—who had all emphasised, for example, how the United States, uncluttered by feudal vestiges, and ecclesiastical burdens, was a locale where a bourgeois order was at the same time the 'natural' and the foundational organisation of society. Australasian league secretary Gilbert Wright even suggested in 1853 that Australia should reject 'Old World' history as a means to emphasise a discontinuity between historical and settler colonial orders: 'We should aim at nationality—at individuality—at a character. We should not blend our associations with the histories of the Old World. Why not have an era—a chronology of our own?'[13]

Parallel to a utopian drive to build an ideal society, there is another structural reason why reference to history would not constitute an effective legitimating discursive trope in settler colonial contexts. In these formations and in typically Lockean fashion, possession flows from improvement and it is labour expended on the land rather than an historical or an ancestral relation to it that can sustain an exclusive claim.[14] Victimologies allow suffering (rather than, for example, prior ownership, an ancestral connection, or an aristocratic background) to become an essential vehicle for legitimacy in a settler colonial context.[15] As a result, settler colonial discourses emphasise victimology and displace history; and settler groups emphasise suffering as a strategy for legitimising their claims to country (i.e. the myth and the reality of the 'struggle with the land'; 'this place was empty, we built it'; 'we are its beginning, therefore it has no previous history'—all classic settler accounts). These discursive constructions require at the same time a parallel denigration of later migrant victimologies (i.e. 'they did not have it as tough as we did') and a constant reinforcement of the notion of an Indigenous non-relationship with the land (i.e. 'they are nomads', 'they did not use this place', etc.). In a settler colonial historiographical order, it is not only settler histories that are denied; Indigenous and migrant histories are also repressed in order to sustain a settler claim to an *original* and *exclusive* relationship with the land. In turn, these constraints do inform migrant historiographies, and the historiography of Indigenous experiences, centred around a discursive reaffirmation of the 'we had it quite tough too' and 'we also built this country' refrains on the one hand, and forced to continuously reiterate Indigenous survival and the very existence of Indigenous pasts on the other.[16]

As founders of political orders that see themselves carrying an inherent and unprecedented sovereignty (unlike migrants, who are appellants *vis-à-vis* political systems that are already established), settlers are often engaged in avoiding a reproduction of the political structures characterising the Old World: settler societies recurrently display a determination to become exemplary societies.[17] As a result, settler narrative forms generally determine a type of emplotment in which the establishment of a settler community ends

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up being at the same time the beginning and the end of history: no real history can be admitted to have happened before a foundational moment that, because of the constituent character of a regenerated body politics, would not be followed by history either. If the development/validation of an ideal society merely follows an originally ideal foundation, history as conflict (a notion shared by Whig interpretations of history as the unfolding of the opposing 'interests' and by Marxist understandings of class struggle) cannot have a place in settler historiographical perceptions.

Indeed, while settler societies are political determinations that declaratively reject the possibility of a class system, yet alone the presence of class conflict, a historyless circumstance must be a situation where contradictions have been ultimately resolved. Donald Denoon's seminal and comparative article on settler societies and their historiographies argued against neglecting 'class' as a category of historical enquiry:

> [t]he historiography of many of these [settler] societies is replete with exceptionalist arguments: social classes may have existed in nineteenth century Europe, but not in regions of recent settlement where social mobility was very rapid; in this society people alternated between two kinds of employment, so classes did not form; or the society was so small and so homogeneous culturally, that class divisions were marginal. Social class could be defined as a phenomenon which occurs everywhere except 'here' [. . .].[18]

Of course he had a point: classes did exist—even in settler societies—and shaped the way people lived; and he set out to demonstrate it.[19] The consistent pattern of rhetorical reference he detected in the settler colonial polities included in his research, however, also pointed to a typically settler colonial reluctance to perceive a settler society as a classed body politic.

The historiography of an impossible history

The need to represent Australia as a settler colonial collective has shaped Australian historiographies and contributed to a historiography systematically intent on displacing conflict. While these considerations are suggestive rather than exhaustive, I am not suggesting that Australia was ever exclusively a settler society, or that no historical works were ever produced. The purpose, however, is to highlight a number of recurring interpretative impasses in a context in which, generally speaking, the expectation was that Australia should have a special history and that this uniqueness was that there would be little of it, and where conflicting necessities produce a situation in which history is claimed and denied at the same time. The aim is to explore the delayed consolidation of a historiography that recurrently faces contradictory needs: doing away with history and making good claims to land and new social orders and, *at the same time*, developing meaningful histories and/or histories that could be appropriate for national purposes.[20] A preoccupation with history (hence, an enhanced concern for memorials, and an emphasis on textbook history,

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historical novels and films, etc.) continuously coexisted with a parallel and contradictory need to downplay it.[21]

There is a long lasting Australian tradition of surprised shock in the face of 'Old World' history and conflict cropping up from within. John Hirst, for example, perceptively noted what he defines as a uniquely Australian determination to repress visible sectarian strife from public life after riots followed Orangist marches in Melbourne in 1846 (he also noted a related and equally 'distinctly Australian response to class conflict': the Arbitration Court).[22] T H Irving's classic 1970s account of 1850s and 1860s Australian political life detected a flow of 'editorial surprise that European feuds could still break out in Australia's benign society' (this was after an Irish immigrant shot and slightly wounded a member of the Royal family in 1868).[23] While this could be understood as a truly Australian reflex, other episodes could be mentioned in this tradition of perception: the Kisch affair, for example, and all the way down to the Cronulla riots of 2005.[24] According to this narrative frame of reference, history does not generate within Australia and its unwanted manifestations also emanate from elsewhere and have to be stopped on their way in—on inbound ships, in international waters, at the beach.[25]

Some positively reclaimed a lack of history and insisted on the possibility that a new beginning would produce an especially egalitarian society (or, conversely, regretted that Australia had failed to fulfil the promise of a truly egalitarian polity and had become classed); others sorely lamented a lack of a civilised (steeped in history) lifestyle. While these are obviously contradicting perspectives, these patterns of opinion share an original perception of an Australian distinctive historyless quality. The long lasting influence of dismissive notions like the 'Cultural Cringe' and of a widespread perception that cultural and other standards are defined elsewhere should also be mentioned in this context.[26] Historiographical orders emphasising a remarkable lack of conflict were only slowly eroded, with the gradual emergence throughout the twentieth century of a fully articulated historiography. Labour history, in particular the work of historian Brian Fitzpatrick, the detection and exploration of sectarian division within the social body (Manning Clark, for example, would challenge obvious omissions, and explore the contradiction between what he defined as 'the Catholic and Protestant view of the world' in the process of abandoning what he called the 'comforters of the past'), women's history, and Aboriginal history were all eventually integrated in the context of a steadily expanding scholarship.[27] A delayed pattern of historiographical consolidation, and traditional structures of reference that remain entrenched in public perception, however, should be the subject of historiographical investigation.

Indeed, reclaiming a lack of history as a defining feature of a new (settler) polity (the 'young and free', that is, the 'young and *therefore* free' refrain, a counterpoint to earlier but not unrelated constructions of the ancient rights of 'freeborn Englishmen', free beyond doubt because enjoying a truly ancient right) is one recurring theme of reflections pertaining to Australia. Percy Reginald Stephensen's 1936 radical nationalist manifesto entitled *The*

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Foundations of Culture in Australia, for example, emphasised how Australia was 'a country *without* any castles or ruins [a country endowed with] thousands of square miles of ground *not* staled by history and tradition'. He also expressed another widely accepted notion: in the case of an Australian nation it was 'race' and 'place' (both typically unchanging elements) and, symptomatically, *not* history that would interact in giving birth to a new national type. He called for the absorption by settlers of the spirit of a place as a way to establish a new national type, which he called: 'the true indigenous Australians'.[28] While settlers recurrently represent themselves as truly native in an attempt to indigenise their claims against Indigenous, migrant and metropolitan others, Stephensen's argument constitutes an exemplary indication that a settler project is *especially* about replacement.[29]

A stress on a lack of political conflict—the myth of the 'Quiet Continent'—is a recurring and long lasting theme of an Australian historiography and would characterise its settler narrative orders.[30] Could a generalised neglect of Indigenous pasts and a parallel disregard for the sectarian and ethnic tension between Irish Catholic and English Protestant, for example, be one result of a settler-determined inclination to erase conflict and history and a function of a typically settler colonial narrative structure? In this tradition, Australia is often represented as a comparatively successful site for a settler colonial experiment, as a locale uniquely apt for the exercise of a settler colonial project (indeed, the need to represent country as 'quiet' is a theme that can be detected in most settler colonial traditions: after all, settling is about pacification). Representations of Australian landscapes as a 'sleeping garden' implied a country awaiting settlers, awaiting an act of settlement so natural that it could be understood as not needing an act of conquest.[31] While in settler colonial narrative structures there is an ongoing need to elide violent encounters and conflict, Australian historiographies often express a radicalised version of this tendency: Keith Windschuttle's anxious reaffirmation that the British colonisation of Australia 'was the least violent of all Europe's encounters with the New World', for example, should be framed in the context of a narrative need to project images of a peaceful process in a pacified country.[32]

Elision of conflict *within* the polity in an Australian context is matched by a related emphasis on the capacity to pick up a fight overseas, as epitomised by the historiographical myth of ANZAC promoted by Ernest Scott and C E W Bean, for example.[33] Ann Curthoys has convincingly remarked how '[i]n Australian popular political culture, commemoration of war displaces the political formation of the nation through Federation as the emotional locus of a sense of nationhood'.[34] This reversal of normal patterns of national observance could be understood as one consequence of a settler-determined need to represent Australians as history-making people provided they make it somewhere else. While a settler-determined vision of history necessitates that Australia as a settler society be somewhat outside of history, a celebration of ANZAC becomes a way to fulfil the apparently contradictory necessity of constructing a national history and at the same time maintaining that history happens overseas.[35] Referring to New Zealand, James Belich noted that how 'independence is demonstrated by a disastrous attack on a place one has never

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heard of, occupied by people who have never heard of New Zealand, on the instructions of another country, has yet to be satisfactorily explained'.[36] This may hold true of Australia as well; at the same time, however, as psychoanalytic practice suggests, displacement is often one outcome of the necessity of dealing with competing impulses.[37]

There are other features characterising the long lasting development of an Australian historiography that would sustain this approach. Uneasiness towards the convict 'stain' and a successive recuperation of convict pasts, for example, share a reluctance in accounting for historical transformation. University of Sydney based historian George Arnold Wood's initial and seminal 'recuperation' of convicts was a way of projecting a struggle between a settler colonial democracy in the making, and the political constraints of a foreign 'imperial' power. While erasure and repression of a convict past had previously been functional to the establishment of a settler colonial project, a later recuperation of convict pasts was also functional to the display of settler images. The more successful the earlier process of erasure had been, the more seamless the obverse process of inclusion could now be. Since Australia had been successful in establishing a unique settler colonial order, convicts could now be retroactively included in the settler colonial project that had been established by way of their exclusion. While Wood rejected an inclination to avoid discussing the convict 'stain', he was able to project a settler order that included convicts in his powerfully defusing definition, 'generally criminals of a low rank', and emphasised their role in nation building and their opposition to the interests of a corrupt English aristocracy. It was a class-ridden 'Old World' society that had produced a classless settler society: 'Is it not clearly a fact that the atrocious criminals remained in England, while their victims, innocent and manly, founded the Australian democracy?', he rhetorically asked.[38] It was discontinuity, the history of a transition between two diametrically opposed exemplary societies—concentrationarian 'Botany Bay' and utopian 'Australia'—that was erased in the process. No major change—no history—had occurred: convicts could be seen as equipped with the determinants required for the building of a settler society because a liberal settler society had eventually been built.[39]

An historiographical emphasis on 'white Australia' can also be construed as a rejection of the possibility of history. Keith Hancock, for example, had supported the necessity of defending a settler colonial order and symptomatically collapsed national and settler identity. Restrictions against non-Europeans were justified because what Australians fear, he had written, 'is not physical conquest by another race, but rather the internal decomposition and degradation of their own civilisation'.[40] While a seamless shift between an appraisal of racial discourse and an assessment of a settler democratic tradition can only be understood in the context of a settler colonial order where the racial identification of an exclusive social body is also one essential prerequisite for the effective enjoyment of an inherent right to sovereign self-governance, an accent on race constitutes an important way of rejecting history in a context where there can be no significant national or class

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articulations in 'white' fragments, and where racial orders could be construed as immutable.[41]

'Australian legend' and settler colonial narrative structures are also related. R M Crawford's original notion of an Australian 'legend' could be construed as a settler colonial trope articulating Australia *through difference* as a 'new' (settler) world intrinsically different from the old one.[42] In *Australia* Crawford became concerned with a set of images purportedly emanating from life on the land, and with an attempt to distinguish a historyless Australian experience and 'type' (facing the outback, disrespectful of human pretentiousness, at times cynical). While 'legend' is located by definition outside of historical processes, this characteristic also emerged from Russel Ward's influential rendition of the 'Australian legend'.[43] As it suggests that Australia is a special place where 'prophecy' better than history can best describe the particular character of a unique polity, Geoffrey Serle's *From Deserts the Prophets Come* also fits in with this historiographical pattern.[44]

Finally, the 'great Australian silence' and the conditions of its supersession should be mentioned in the context of a brief outline of a repressed historiography. Its nature may also stem from a contradictory need to represent a historyless history, as settler colonial historiographical regimes would not easily allow for the acknowledgement of a history of Indigenous people before or after invasion (again, this is because the settler colonial project is premised on the denial of Indigenous presences *and* because a settler project is not supposed to produce historical dynamics, especially a history of violent confrontation and land wars).[45] It is not a coincidence that Indigenous history was literally repatriated from overseas by C D Rowley and W E H Stanner working in Papua New Guinea and developing the structures that would allow a successive incorporation of an Aboriginal history within public discourse.[46] History and colonialism were happening overseas: they had to be 'smuggled in' by scholars (it is significant that both Stanner and Rowley were not historians) who were in a position to finally bypass the conceptual blockages embedded in a settler colonial conception of history.

Conclusion: *historia nullius*

'Heritage' emerges as the only non-unsettling form of history in a settler determined political body.[47] A disinclination to deal with history as process (as opposed to history as residue) is confirmed, for example, by a propensity to emphasise heritage rather than transformation. Prime Minister John Howard's recent insistence that history emphasise what he defines as an 'objective record of achievement' confirms this pattern of perception.[48] These approaches are, after all, a negation of history that identifies the present with the past.[49] On the contrary, history could be a situation where the past is seen as insisting dialectically on the present; as Eric Hobsbawm has noted, 'The past is another country, but it has left its mark on those who once lived there.'[50] Whereas in the case of 'heritage' (understood as legacy, or inheritance) the focus is on the present and the object is the past, in a settler

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colonial narrative system the only possible history remains a continuous and unbroken succession of developmental passages—literally, a 'record of achievement'.[51] Criticising Windschuttle ended up becoming a true Australian historiographical genre; and whereas a number of scholars have endeavoured with success to show how he is not an excellent historian, or a fair assessor of historical work, the fact that his reasoning is not historical has not yet been emphasised.[52] Windschuttle deploys a logic that collapses the present with what he perceives/supposes/wishes to be the past:

> Ever since they were founded in 1788, the British colonies in Australia were civilised societies governed by both morality and laws that forbade the killing of the innocent. The notion that the frontier was a place where white men could kill blacks with impunity ignores the powerful cultural and legal prohibitions on such action.[53]

That is: no Aboriginal person is presently being hunted down, we claim an absolute identification with our settler colonial heritage (we are civilised now and we always were), we cannot therefore accept that Indigenous people *could* have been killed at any time (good people *like us*/good people *that are us* could not have allowed that to happen). Unlike history, this is especially an exercise in identification. Yet again, if one feels that Australia should not have much history, *all* history looks like a fabrication.[54]

John Farrell's 1889 officially sanctioned and celebratory composition entitled *Australia* associates an emphasis on pacified surroundings with the suggestion that a land that escaped horrors endemic elsewhere would express God's will that earthly redemption might be found. *Australia* evocatively displays a number of widely held notions: Australia was inherently different from anywhere else, it had no history, and as a settler society (by now forgetful of a painful colonial past) would have none. Farrell was explicit about a historylessness that precedes and follows settlement; it seems appropriate to quote at length:

> 'And once again will they, with eyes unheeding
> His sacrifice, uplift their guilty hands
> Each to his brother, and with rage exceeding,
> And lust and vengeance, desolate the lands;
> But this one land', so mused He, the Creator,
> 'This will I bless, and shield from all the woe,
> That worthier among men, in ages later,
> May find it pure, and, haply, hold it so!'
>
> So, sweet Australia, fell a benediction
> Of sleep upon thee, where no wandering breath
> Might come to tell thee of the loud affliction
> Of cursing tongues, and clamouring hosts of death;
> So with the peace of His great love around thee,
> And rest that clashing ages could not break,
> Strong prying eyes of English seekers found thee,
> Strong English voices cried to thee 'Awake!'

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For them a continent, undreamed of, peerless—
A realm for happier sons of theirs to be,
One spot preserved, unspotted, bloodless, tearless,
Beyond the rim of an enchanted sea
Lay folded in the soft compelling languor
Of warm south airs, as an awaiting bride,
While strife and hate, and culminating anger
Raged through the far-off nations battle-dyed.

Here no dread vestiges stood up imprinted
With evil messages and brands of Cain,
No mounds of death or walls of refuge dinted
With signs that Christ had lived and died in vain;
No chill memorials here proclaimed the story
Of kinship stricken for and murders done;
Here was a marvel and a separate glory
One land whose history had not begun!

One unsown garden fenced by sea-crags sterile,
Whose mailed breasts pushed back strong-breasted waves,
From all the years of fierce unrest and peril,
And slaves, and lords, and broken blades, and graves;
One gracious freehold for the free, where only
Soft dusky feet fell, reaching not thy sleep
One field inviolate, untroubled, lonely
Across the dread of the uncharted deep![55]

A land that is awoken by the appearance of a settler collective, a land that remains historyless ('worthier' men would 'hold it so') and 'One gracious freehold for the free'—possibly as good a definition as any of a settler colonial determination—are key to Farrell's emphasis on the typically messianic settler colonial trait of endeavouring the establishment of an earthly redeemed polity.

A settler beginning is the beginning of history, but it is also its end. And if a 'gracious freehold' is seen as crucially epitomising a settler colonial end of history, no wonder that native title can be upsetting: it denies any graciousness and it demonstrates that it was not free—that many had to pay dearly. It is similarly unsurprising that the notion of the stolen generations can be so upsetting: stolen children also deny graciousness and demonstrate that it was not free—that many lost their freedom. Most importantly, native title and stolen generations deny the end of history, and crucially reintroduce historical process in the picture (for example, as the history of partial enforcement and locally selective of *terra nullius* in various parts of Australia; yes, *terra nullius* does exist, and it does have a history).[56]

Farrell's summation of an historical *tabula rasa* amounted to a type of *historia nullius* as much indispensable for the discursive practices of a settler colonial collective as its counterpoint dealing with real estate. Absence, excision, silences, amnesia and other defensive formations can all be interpreted as discursive necessities of a (settler colonial) need to emphasise

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the anti-political impossibility of conflict, class struggle, sectarian divisions, Indigenous survival, ethnic strife, etc. Previous to the intellectual shifts that began in the 1960s an Australian historiography would often attempt the writing of an impossible history.

Notes

[1] John L Comaroff, 'Images of Empire, Contests of Conscience: Models of Colonial Domination in South Africa', *American Ethnologist* 16, 1989, p 667.

[2] Daniel Joseph Walther, *Creating Germans Abroad: Cultural Policies and National Identity in Namibia*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002, p 183. Although it does not distance itself from the colonial dimension and language of German South West Africa, Walther's book remains a source of information pertaining to a specific example of a settler colonial project.

[3] See Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp 59–64.

[4] Quoted in Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, p 93. Of course, parallel to this rejection of history, Zionism consistently expressed a determination to repossess history. It is important to note how dialectically opposed impulses coexisted and coalesced in the formation of different political traditions.

[5] Patrick Wolfe, 'Islam, Europe and Indian Nationalism: Towards a Postcolonial Transnationalism', in Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake (eds), *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective*, Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2005, p 235.

[6] Edmund S Morgan, *The Genuine Article: A Historian Looks at Early America*, New York: Norton, 2005, p 23.

[7] See, for example, Eric R Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

[8] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, London: Penguin, 1967, pp 39–40.

[9] See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, New York: Perennial Classics, 2000, and Cheryl B Welch, *de Tocqueville*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. The impact this narrative had on settler political traditions should not be underestimated, as it directly shaped Turnerian notions of 'frontier' democracy, for example, and, by way of analogy and identification, other settler entities as well.

[10] Ayse Deniz Temiz, 'Dialogues with *A Forgetful Nation*: Genealogy of Immigration Discourses in the US', *borderlands e-journal* 5(3), 2006. The URL for this article is: http://www.borderlandsejournal.adelaide.edu.au/vol5no3_2006/temiz_behdad.htm

[11] See John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government: A Critical Edition with an Introduction and Apparatus*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1965 [1690], # 48, 49.

[12] Anthony Moran, 'As Australia Decolonizes: Indigenizing Settler Nationalism and the Challenges of Settler/Indigenous Relations', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25, 2002, p 1016.

[13] Quoted in T H Irving, '1850–70', in Francis K Crowley (ed.), *A New History of Australia*, Melbourne: W Heinemann, 1974, p 133. For various reasons not entirely unrelated to a perceived need to enact an anthropological revolution, other regimes would also symbolically mark their breaking away from historical orders. Both Fascist Italy and Gaddafi's Libya, for example, would enact a separate chronology.

[14] Isn't it interesting that a most reasonable implication of this logic, that settlers degrading and/or defacing the land with poor environmental management should be dispossessed, has not yet been argued?

[15] Ann Curthoys's work on Australian victimologies quotes anthropologist Andrew Lattas, who 'examined how Australian nationalist discourses emphasize a struggle in which the pioneer, the explorer and the artist all *suffer* as they seek to possess the land', and where 'White settler suffering [...] becomes a means for conferring right of ownership to the land.' Ann Curthoys, 'Expulsion, Exodus and Exile in White Australian Historical Mythology', *Journal of Australian Studies* 61, 1999, p 3.

[16] For examples of how these interpretative necessities informed scholarly research, see, respectively: Gianfranco Cresciani, *The Italians in Australia*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, which concludes a long trajectory of inscription of ethnic migrant histories within national historiographical orders; Lorna Lippmann, *Generations of Resistance: The Aboriginal Struggle for Justice*, Melbourne:

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Longman Cheshire, 1981; and Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1981.

[17] This definition of settler endeavours (a characterisation focusing on a particular set of political traditions) differs from other approaches to the study of settler colonial forms, where emphasis is placed on the political ascendancy of 'fragment'-establishing newcomers. See, for example, Louis Hartz (ed.), *The Founding of New Societies: Studies in the History of the United States, Latin America, South Africa, Canada, and Australia*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964.

[18] Donald Denoon, 'Understanding Settler Societies', *Historical Studies* 18(73), 1979, pp 526–527.

[19] In *The Fatal Shore*—which outsells all other history books on Australia—Robert Hughes subverted this trope by concluding that, on the contrary, 'the question of class was all pervasive and pathological'. Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, New York: Knopf, 1987, p 323.

[20] On a number of specific constraints characterising history writing in Australia, see Ann Curthoys, 'Does Australian History Have a Future?' *Australian Historical Studies* 118, 2002, pp 140–152. For an early detection of an Australian inclination to forget, see Bernard Smith's groundbreaking *The Spectre of Truganini*, Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1980, especially pp 17–25.

[21] In his analysis of the anti-transportation movement, a key moment in the transition to an Australian settler colonial order, John Hirst detected a particular sensitivity to history: while he noted how its promoters were 'very conscious they were making history' he also recorded how, immediately after the movement's victory, 'John West, one of its Tasmanian leaders, wrote its history'. John Hirst, *Convict Society and its Enemies: A History of Early New South Wales*, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1983, pp 212, 216.

[22] John Hirst, 'Australia's Absurd History', in John Hirst, *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History*, Melbourne: Black Inc., 2005, pp 14, 16.

[23] Irving, '1850–70', pp 163–164.

[24] On the 'Kisch affair' see, for example, Heidi Zogbaum, *Kisch in Australia: The Untold Story*, Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2004. A perceptive reconstruction of the Cronulla riots is presented in Suvendrini Pereira, 'Race Terror, Sydney, December 2005', *borderlands e-journal*, 5(1), 2006. The URL for this essay is: http://www.borderlandsejournal.adelaide.edu.au/vol5no1_2006/perera_raceterror.htm

[25] I am not suggesting that sectional, class, or ethnic strife should be promoted; a peculiar and long lasting pattern of perception assuming that these conflicts are intrinsically un-Australian, however, should be the subject of further exploration.

[26] See A A Phillips, *The Cultural Cringe*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006. Here one could also mention historian Keith Hancock's recurring ridicule of Australian mediocrity and of an Australian incapacity of producing 'history'—a possible case in point in the phenomenology of narrative envy.

[27] See Brian Fitzpatrick, *A Short History of the Australian Labor Movement*, Melbourne: Rawson's Bookshop, 1944; Manning Clark, 'Rewriting Australian History', in Manning Clark, *Occasional Writings and Speeches*, Melbourne: Fontana Books, 1980, pp 4, 10; Miriam Dixson, *The Real Matilda: Woman and Identity in Australia, 1788–1975*, Melbourne: Penguin, 1976; and Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonization of Women in Australia*, Melbourne: Penguin, 1975. For an outline of the evolution of Aboriginal history as a field of historical enquiry, see Lorenzo Veracini, 'A Prehistory of Australia's History Wars: The Evolution of Aboriginal History during the 1970s and 1980s', *Australian Journal of History and Politics* 52, 2006, pp 439–454.

[28] Quoted in Anthony Moran, 'As Australia Decolonizes: Indigenizing Settler Nationalism and the Challenges of Settler/Indigenous Relations', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25, 2002, pp 1019, 1020. For a definition of settler colonialism as essentially a project of replacement, see Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, London: Cassell, 1999.

[29] One example of how settler narratives often replicate a settler colonial need to enforce replacement is provided by an interpretation of *Waltzing Matilda* as a settler story, where the process of indigenization of the settler is completed and a settler logic of replacement is carried to its full logical extent (i.e. there is no Aboriginal presence whatsoever—except for an Aboriginal terminology that has been comprehensively, and significantly, appropriated and made truly own). In *Waltzing Matilda* the settler *is* the 'native': 'nomadically' inhabiting what is constructed as a pristine idyll before experiencing in succession the passages that would constitute a history of the Aboriginal experience: invasion, the clash of competing claims, a decision to fight against overwhelming odds rather than surrender to a claim that is perceived as ultimately illegitimate, extermination, and eventual haunting of country, are all elements of its narrative structure. And since a settler consciousness has entirely replaced an Indigenous presence, *Waltzing Matilda* is especially the story of an Indigenous dispossession. Crucially, its political imaginary is also a typically settler one, with a marked emphasis on an anti-aristocratic political message. Rejecting

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the possibility of establishing an aristocratic regime and its claims, however, is a rejection of history in this context, as any aristocratic regime by definition legitimises rule by reference to precedent and to historical realities. For a recent analysis of *Waltzing Matilda*'s story and its relation to interpreting Australian history, see Inga Clendinnen, 'The History Question: Who Owns the Past', *Quarterly Essay* 23, 2006, especially pp 3–8. See also Matthew Richardson, *Once a Jolly Swagman: The Ballad of Waltzing Matilda*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006.

[30] See, for example, Douglas Pike, *Australia: The Quiet Continent*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962. Indeed, for a long time 'Australia' was the standard title for a history book, as if a description of place could exhaust the history of an inherently historyless locale.

[31] For examples of this pattern of perception, see Paul Carter, *Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History*, London: Faber and Faber, 1987, and Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Elsewhere, settler political traditions could not possibly lay claim to a 'quiet land' and a celebration of frontier violence became a feature of national mythologies (in the US, for example). In these instances, however, the 'quietness' trope re-emerges *after* the 'closing' of troubled frontiers, when the establishment of a settled/settler order can be finally pursued.

[32] Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002, p 3.

[33] Ernest Scott, *A Short History of Australia*, London: Oxford University Press, 1916; C E W Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1921–1942. See also Donald Denoon, 'The Isolation of Australian History', *Historical Studies* 87, 1986, pp 252–260.

[34] Ann Curthoys, 'Expulsion, Exodus and Exile in White Australian Historical Mythology', *Journal of Australian Studies* 61, 1999, p 12.

[35] On Anzac memorials, see Ken Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press/Melbourne University Press, 1998. On war and memory in Australia, see Liz Reed, *Bigger than Gallipoli: War, History, and Memory in Australia*, Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 2004.

[36] James Belich, 'Colonization and History in New Zealand', in Robin W Winks (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Historiography*, vol. V, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p 185.

[37] See also Marilyn Lake, 'Monuments, Manhood and Colonial Dependence: The Cult of Anzac as Compensation', in Marilyn Lake (ed.), *Memory, Monuments and Museums: The Past in the Present*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006.

[38] G A Wood, 'Convicts', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* VIII(IV), 1922, p 187.

[39] John Hirst's 1983 book on New South Wales convict society, a contribution to the 'normalising school' on convict society, argues a similar conclusion by way of a different process: it was not a democratic tradition that should be upheld but had to struggle against British repression; on the contrary, it was a democratic tradition that should be upheld *and* one that could flourish under British rule (i.e. concentrationarian Australia was never a brutalised society). See John Hirst, *Convict Society and its Enemies: A History of Early New South Wales*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1983.

[40] W K Hancock, *Australia*, London: Ernest Benn Ltd, 1930, p 80.

[41] South African historian George McCall Theal's reconciliation of British and Boer experiences had performed a similar narrative shift in a South African context. His massive production epitomises a settler historiography, with a shift towards race and towards appraising a conflict between civilisation and barbarism. Leonard Thompson, for example, concludes that 'Theal was a settler historian par excellence'. Leonard Thompson, *The Political Mythology of Apartheid*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, p 56.

[42] R M Crawford, *Australia*, London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1952.

[43] Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958.

[44] Geoffrey Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come: The Creative Spirit in Australia 1788–1972*, Melbourne: Heinemann, 1973. Indeed, even Manning Clark's recurring reference to a tragic register could be seen as one type of displacement, where an Australian history can only exist on the provision that it be recognised as the unfolding of a tragedy.

[45] However, in *Looking for Blackfellas' Point*, Mark McKenna provides a related and complementary argument. As well as forgetting and erasure, settler narratives can construe an active denial of responsibility, one result of a settler community's need to 'create history in their own image'. One consequence of this narrative requirement is that even acknowledgment of Indigenous destruction becomes a discursive device by which the Indigenous presence is placed in an irretrievable and unrecoverable past—a way to confirm that Indigenous people do not have a place in settler histories. See Mark McKenna, *Looking for Blackfellas' Point: An Australian History of Place*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002, p 94.

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[46] See Veracini, 'A Prehistory of Australia's History Wars', p 454.
[47] See, for example, John Moloney, *Australia: Our Heritage*, Melbourne: Australian Scholarly, 2006.
[48] See John Howard's remarks in his 2006 Australia Day speech on the need to present a structured narrative and abandon a 'fragmented stew of themes and issues'. Howard quoted in Inga Clendinnen, 'The History Question: Who Owns the Past', *Quarterly Issue* 23, 2006, p 2. Clendinnen was about to participate in a 'History Summit' on the reformation of the teaching of Australian history organized by federal Education Minister Julie Bishop.
[49] The outstanding success of TV series like 'The Colony', where contemporary Australians are asked to fully immerse themselves in nineteenth-century circumstances, is a case in point. See Belinda Gibbon, *The Colony: The Book from the Popular SBS Living History Series*, Sydney: Random House Australia, 2006.
[50] Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-century Life*, London: Abacus, 2003.
[51] Clendinnen insightfully summarises this approach as the 'triumph of British explorers and settlers in overcoming the recalcitrant land [. . .] smoke rising from slab huts, the sound of axes ringing through the blue air, and so on'. See Clendinnen, 'The History Question', p 3.
[52] See, for example, Robert Manne, 'In Denial: The Stolen Generation and the Right', *Quarterly Essay* 1, 2001; Robert Manne (ed.), *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, Melbourne: Black Inc., 2003; and Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003.
[53] Keith Windschuttle, 'The Break-up of Australia', *Quadrant*, November 2000. This article is also available at: http://www.sydneyline.com/Massacres%20Part%20Two.htm
[54] See Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002, p 3.
[55] John Farrell, 'Australia', quoted in Ian Turner (ed.), *The Australian Dream: A Collection of Anticipations about Australia from Captain Cook to the Present Day*, Melbourne: Sun Books, 1968, pp 236–237.
[56] For an anxious—and ultimately unconvincing—attempt to deny its very existence, see Michael Connor, *The Invention of Terra Nullius: Historical and Legal Fictions on the Foundation of Australia*, Sydney: Macleay Press, 2005.