INTRODUCTION

In the official history of the First World War, Australian historian and founder of the Australian War Memorial Charles Bean stated, ‘in no unreal sense it was on the 25th of April, 1915 that the consciousness of Australian nationhood was born’. There are many implications of such a statement, both for the history of Australia and the way in which Australia as a nation is defined by placing such importance on this particular day in the First World War.

This article will consider these implications, and the way in which Australian national identity is constructed through such histories of war. In particular, it will look at how commemorations of war and the Anzacs are considered celebrations of what it means to be Australian, and will argue that such constructions deny the experiences of Indigenous Australians in their wars to defend their country from colonisation. Furthermore, it will posit that such denials represent an effort to continue presenting the country as a normatively Western country rather than acknowledging the prior ownership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The memorials to Indigenous Australians who lost their lives in colonial land wars will also be discussed by way of comparison with those memorials commemorating the Anzacs.

By necessity throughout this paper terms have been used which depict different racial groups of people. Such terms are always problematic since they subsume many differing characteristics and experiences under one label. For the purposes of this paper, ‘white’ refers to the dominant mode of belonging in Australia as a country striving to fit into Western ways of knowing. As Ghassan Hage argues,
whiteness here exists as a form of ‘cultural capital’ which incorporates many different attributes of which skin colour is only one. As such, the term ‘white’ used within this paper refers to those people who make up the dominant group in Australia, and who have attributes which reinforce Australia’s connections with Britain, such as having fair skin, speaking English and having values which are consistent with Western ways of living. The term ‘Indigenous’ refers to those peoples who were in Australia before colonisation, and includes both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

**FORMING THE NATION: THE ANZACS**

On 25 April 1915 Australian soldiers, together with troops from New Zealand and Britain, landed at what became known as ‘Anzac Cove’ on the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey. The purpose of the landing was to eliminate the Turkish land and sea defenses, capture Constantinople, and open up the narrow Dardanelles for the passage of the Royal Navy. However the landing failed and after eight months of fighting the soldiers were evacuated from the beach. It is estimated that around two thousand men died in the first two weeks at Gallipoli alone with a total of approximately 7600 lost lives.

The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, or ‘Anzacs’, came to be a household name in Australia, and are celebrated as an important part of Australian history and mythology despite the defeat and large loss of life. The ‘New Zealand’ aspect of the acronym, however, is largely ignored within Australia, and the Anzacs are portrayed as symbolising values and attitudes which are distinctly Australian, and are generally considered to have had a large impact on the formation of Australian national identity.

The soldiers who lost their lives in the Gallipoli campaign are commemorated on what is now known as Anzac Day, which is celebrated annually as a public holiday. Together with Australia Day, Anzac day is now generally thought to be one of the most important celebrations of Australian national identity. People gather all around the country to attend a dawn service in order to commemorate the soldiers who lost their lives in the failed attempt to occupy Gallipoli, and to celebrate qualities such as ‘mateship’ and courage which are thought to be indicative of the ‘Anzac spirit’ and are considered distinctively Australian.

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But historically, Anzac Day has not always been considered so important to Australia’s identity. From the middle of the 1960s to the early 1990s Anzac Day was not accorded such reverence, and there were many instances of protest—particularly from feminist groups who were against war and the prioritising of masculine views of history.6 The elevation of the Anzacs to their status as a national myth was especially pronounced during the years when John Howard was Prime Minister (1996–2007). Howard reinforced the importance of Anzac Day to the Australian national identity through the erection of numerous memorials, which were accompanied by his focus on commemorating Anzac Day through expensive annual celebrations and pilgrimages to overseas war graves.

Ironically, this revival of what could be seen as white, masculinist celebrations of war (such as Anzac Day) occurred at a time when there was a growing Indigenous rights movement, with questions asked about the legitimacy of the white Australian nation which was founded at the expense of the Indigenous people. It has been argued that ‘history is called on to do its work whenever the national identity is thought to be in need of reinvigoration’.7 As such, this focus on the commemoration of Anzac Day and other military achievements could be read as not only an attempt to glorify histories of war, but also to create a narrative about Australia which reinvigorates the status of ‘Aussie’ soldiers as quintessentially ‘Australian’, thereby reinforcing the Australian identity as ‘white’.8 Consequently, it is through Australia’s participation in a war that Australia is retrospectively seen as having ‘come of age’ as a nation. This is reinforced in Australian consciousness and the ‘imagining’ of Australia as a nation through the many, many memorials of fallen Aussie soldiers and the days set aside throughout the year (such as Anzac Day and Remembrance Day) in which those who lost their lives in war are commemorated.9

**CONTESTINGISTORY**

Whilst for many, sites of commemoration such as those seen in relation to Anzac Day may appear to simply accord recognition and memorialise ‘the facts’, Australian memorials to war veterans and Anzacs also serve another purpose. As Subhabrata Banerjee and Goldie Osuri argue, ‘history becomes presented as knowledge: the fact that this knowledge is embedded in discourses of power is masked’.10 As such, history and its physical manifestation in memorials can also

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6 Nicoll, *From Diggers to Drag Queens*.  
8 Reed, *Bigger than Gallipoli*, 5.  
10 Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee and Goldie Osuri, ‘Silences of the Media: Whiting out Aboriginality in Making News"
be read as sites of power through which certain concepts of national identity are able to be reinforced and maintained, whilst other versions of history (which present a different reality and a different national identity) are suppressed and hidden. It is through such sites of commemoration that certain histories are able to be prioritised over others, and one of the ways in which history is able to be cemented in national consciousness as fact.

As a result of this difference in power between groups of people, Anzac Day and other contributions by Australian soldiers to overseas wars are widely celebrated and considered to have shaped Australia as a nation, whilst the wars fought by Indigenous Australians against British colonisers are largely ignored. Anna Clark comments on this, stating that, ‘Concomitant with the struggle to define official narratives is the capacity for official forgetting… The longstanding exclusion of Aboriginal experience in Australian history writing, for instance, could only be attributed to a “whitening” or “silencing” of their history’.

Such notions of Australian history tend to focus almost exclusively on white Australian history, and therefore only on the history of Australia since 1788. For example, historian Henry Reynolds, in his autobiography *Why Weren’t We Told?*, questions why it was that the history he was taught made very little mention of Indigenous history, or of any of the conflicts experienced when the British attempted to colonise the country.

In fact, since the 1960s and 1970s a rethinking of Australia’s past, coupled with a growing Indigenous rights movement has led to recognition of this lack of attention to Indigenous history. This has been seen in the work of both non-Indigenous historians such as Lyndall Ryan, Henry Reynolds and Andrew Markus and Indigenous historians such as Jackie Huggins and Greg Lehman who have all fought to prioritise Indigenous histories. Recognition has also been accorded to the multiple histories of colonisation held by Indigenous communities, which exceed the totalising effects of white accounts of Australian history that have both previously and in the present promoted the aforementioned ‘whitened’ view of Australian history.

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As a result, notions of the Anzacs as central to Australian identity were questioned, and attempts were made by historians such as those mentioned above to try and foreground Indigenous histories. However, such attempts received resistance, and were criticised strongly by conservative politicians and historians for being too negative and divisive. Historian Geoffrey Blainey coined the term ‘Black Armband’ to refer to this view of Australian history, and the term has been used to denote those versions of history which speak of Australia being ‘invaded’ as opposed to being ‘settled’, and which represent British colonisers in a negative light, focusing instead on Indigenous dispossession and loss.

The ensuing argument has been termed the ‘History Wars’: a fight between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ versions of Australian history, where ‘positive’ versions stress that colonisation was a worthy enterprise, and ‘negative’ versions stress stories of invasion, dispossession, and attempted genocide towards Indigenous Australians. As Ann Curthoys notes, Indigenous peoples rarely appear at all in ‘positive’ versions but do appear in ‘negative’ ones as victims of white aggression and white racism. In general, the versions of history most favored in the past have been those which privilege settler and pioneer hardships, and which emphasise white histories such as participation in the First World War. In their book The History Wars, Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark argue that these versions of history minimise or ignore the effects of colonisation upon Indigenous peoples, and the wars they fought to retain ownership of their land. They argue that this is seen in the work of Keith Windschuttle, whose book The Fabrication of Aboriginal History attempted to question the reliability of those historians (such as Lyndall Ryan and Henry Reynolds) who have examined the history of colonial Tasmania, and to minimise the number of Aboriginal people thought to have been killed during colonisation.

This has led to a situation where, as Ann Curthoys argues, the more serious conflicts amongst historians in the last few decades have been those in which national honour was felt to be at stake. She argues that in many cases, these conflicts were about the foundation of the nation, and this is clearly seen in the ‘history wars’ since, as a colonial nation with a recent history of dispossession, there is much at stake to ensure that white Australians are seen to be able to legitimately belong in the country. Legends such as the Anzac tradition of great battles fought by white Australians in the name of their country allow for white...
belonging to be legitimised, and this ownership would be threatened if it were officially considered that Indigenous people fought and died for their country against the very people who would be the forefathers of those sent to fight at Gallipoli.

The result of this threat to perceived white ownership of Australia is that the battles fought by Indigenous Australians to protect their land from colonisation are excluded from the national consciousness. These battles do not count in the tales of the ‘formation’ of Australia as a nation, despite being central to the way in which Australia came to be ‘white’. In fact, it could be argued that the conflict over Australia’s history can be read as a conflict to ensure the maintenance of Australia’s status as a legitimately white country by excluding Indigenous versions of history, and attempting to overlook the fact that Indigenous Australians did see the land as theirs by still affirming the myth of terra nullius.

**Creating Identity—Victimological Narrative and the ‘Digger’**

The ‘history wars’ illustrate the fact that, as Riggs suggests, rather than being understood as an ‘objective truth’, history is ‘a meaning-making practice that privileges certain groups of people over others, and which thus legitimates the worldview of particular groups to the exclusion and oppression of others’. This privileging of certain histories over others is clearly evident in the definition of Australian identity as created through participation in wars fought overseas. Such a construction of Australian identity prioritises white belonging as the dominant mode of belonging in Australia, by mythologising white male achievements and excludes many minority groups from being represented in the national image, including women and recently arrived immigrants by focusing on achievements made by white males.

However, whilst the struggles of Indigenous Australians against the colonisers in the frontier wars continue to be denied by authors such as Windschuttle, there are struggles which do figure in the stories of the colonisation of Australia. Such stories involve those struggles which the white colonisers experienced with an unfamiliar and ‘wild’ land rather than with the Indigenous inhabitants. Such depictions of white pioneers’ struggling against all odds against a land and climate very different to what they had come from figures strongly in most versions of Australian history, and it has been argued that white suffering becomes a

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20 Michelle Arrow, “That History Should Not Have Ever Been How It Was”: The Colony, Outback House, and Australian History’, *Film and History* 37, no. 1 (2007), 56.
means for conferring right of ownership for the land. Curthoys suggests that in order for Australia to be considered normatively white there is a need for a ‘baptism of fire’, and since this cannot be done through acknowledgement of wars with Indigenous Australians, struggles with the land are instead given precedence. Within such narratives, ‘pioneers’ are depicted as struggling against a harsh land, and as surviving against all odds. Here, Indigenous people appear as invaders rather than as the invaded, making attacks against British colonisers’ livelihoods in the form of livestock and crops, and as threatening their women and children.

Through this lens, the commemoration of Anzac Day discussed above can be read as a way of continuing this tradition of white suffering. As Ann Curthoys argues, the Anzac myth ‘has its power as the story of innocence betrayed, the fittest young men of the young nation giving their all for their country and empire and shot down cruelly’. Within such stories, Australian men are seen as making the ultimate sacrifice for their country, and as such, victimological narratives of white suffering such as those that are seen in Gallipoli and in the epic tales of battles with the land, allow for white Australians to create a narrative for themselves of sacrifice and hardship which in turn creates a narrative of ownership of the land. Within this ideology, white ties with the land can be depicted as exceeding those made by Indigenous Australians who, it is argued, neither fought for their land nor even had any concept that it was theirs in the first place.

And so it is that white Australia is able to create an identity for itself through the sacrifices made by men fighting both the land in Australia and in battles fought overseas. In fact, Rainbird argues that the original figure of the ‘Aussie’ that was seen in stereotypical images of the bushman or pioneer was later transformed into popular representations of the ‘Aussie’ soldier or the Anzacs. Both the pioneers and the Anzacs are represented as being tough, masculine and practical, both have a wry sense of humour, both are disrespectful of authority and both are dedicated to their ‘mates’. Both are ‘unashamedly male’.

Of course, basing Australian national identity on characteristics thought to be those of white males excludes many Australians from what is thought to be

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25 Ibid.
quintessentially Australian, including, as mentioned earlier, women and those Australians who do not identify as white, such as immigrants, refugees, and Indigenous Australians. Apart from that, the depiction is still problematic. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues: ‘[t]he core values which were displayed by diggers on the battle fields are never linked to their colonial origins and the part they played in claiming the nation as a white possession’. In other words, the irony of such a construction of what is considered quintessentially ‘Australian’ is that those very values displayed by Aussie diggers in battle are descended from the very same proprietal values which enabled white settlers to dispossess Indigenous Australians from their lands.

This focus on white victimological narratives and the Anzacs means that a significant gap in dominant histories of the formation of Australian identity is the presence of Indigenous Australians, who are largely excluded from what is broadly considered to be the most definitive construction of Australian national identity. They are excluded on two levels. First, through the lack of recognition of Indigenous participation in these wars, and the lack of recognition afforded them at the time when many Indigenous soldiers were either underpaid or not paid at all. Second, Indigenous people are excluded as a result of the fact that such a construction of the First World War as being the ‘first war fought by Australians’ denies the wars fought by Indigenous peoples against European colonisers, and thereby privileges white histories over those held by Indigenous Australians.

**MEMORIALISATION AND FORGETTING**

The affirmation of Australian identity as forged through battles fought with the land and with enemies overseas has its physical manifestation in the many memorials set up around the country to remember those who lost their lives fighting. In his book *Sacred Places*, Ken Inglis claims that there are over four thousand war memorials in the Australian landscape. The most prominent of these memorials is the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, which is one of the country’s largest museums and tourist attractions. As a key site complicit in the construction of a dominant Australian identity, the Australian War Memorial serves to depict a particular image of war, and to reaffirm the ‘birth’ of Australia as occurring on 25 April 1915. As Nicoll states:

> In commemorating a great sacrifice that occurred elsewhere, the memorial articulates an important element of a white nationalist ontology. The construction of the

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27 Reed, *Bigger than Gallipoli*, 145.
28 Inglis, *Sacred Places*, 471.
Great War as a test, or process of ‘blooding’, through which a previously ‘innocent’
Australia passed into a state of national ‘maturity’, pervades Anzac mythology.29

Memorials such as the Australian War Memorial serve not only to recognise and
remember those men who lost their lives fighting in wars, but also to generate
a particular understanding of Australian history, and to decide what is worth
remembering and what is not. Such memorials exist at ‘the intersection of history
and memory’ and function not only to reflect what it is that a community wishes
to remember, but also to influence how (and which) events will be remembered
in the future.30

The large number of war memorials in Australia, coupled with the many
memorial services held to commemorate those who lost their lives, illustrates the
desire of white Australia to remember its participation in the wars fought in the
name of the new ‘Australia’—no longer Indigenous or British—in whose name
the troops were sent to fight overseas. The above quote from Nicoll indicates
that such memorialisation also serves to reify the struggles which white Australia
experienced in wars fought overseas in order to further commemorate the ‘birth
of the Australian nation’. As mentioned previously, the Howard government,
in particular, ensured that this desire was well and truly met. Ken Inglis argues
that the period from 1995 to 2005 saw a greater number of memorials being
built than in any other period since the 1920s.31 In fact, the Howard government
invested millions of dollars in reinforcing and commemorating the role Australian
troops played in overseas wars by building plaques and war memorials, making
annual pilgrimages to battlefields and ensuring that there were many public
commemorations for those who fought for their country.32 As Lake argues; ‘The
exhortation “Lest We Forget” reminds us that memory left to its own devices
can be fickle or unreliable’33 and therefore requires constant reinforcing.

Such reinforcement is important because, Pierre Nora reminds us, ‘legitimation
by the past, and therefore by history yields to legitimation by the future’.34
Following this logic, if white Australia is legitimated in the past (for example
through memorials to those who lost their lives fighting wars overseas), then it
will also appear legitimate in the future. Reading this attempt to legitimate the past
alongside the relative lack of commemoration of Australia’s colonial land wars,
it becomes clear that such encounters do not merit memorialising because for

29 Nicoll, Diggers to Drag Queens, 175.
31 Inglis, Sacred Places, 471.
33 Ibid., 9.
white Australia, they represent events which would be best forgotten since they present the possibility of exposing the illegitimate ways in which the nation was ‘founded’ as white.\textsuperscript{35} Such an exposure of the colonial past as illegitimate would therefore remove the legitimation of the future of a Western, white Australia and would instead highlight white Australia as founded upon the dispossession of Indigenous Australians.

Ken Inglis’ work on memorialisation reveals that, whilst memorials for wars fought overseas are prolific and prominent, memorials for Indigenous Australians’ wars fought against the colonisers are not accorded the same recognition.\textsuperscript{36} He argues that memorialisation of the Anzacs was so important in Australia that memorials started to appear on the Australian landscape within a year after the landing at Gallipoli.\textsuperscript{37} One of the first of these was at Balmain in Sydney, where a memorial in the form of a drinking fountain was unveiled on 23 April 1916.\textsuperscript{38} This was quickly followed by many memorials built all around Australia in order to honour those who fought and died in the First World War.

Such recognition functions not only to memorialise the Anzacs and Australia’s participation on foreign battlefields, but also to overlook or ignore Australia’s Indigenous history and the struggles Indigenous Australians went through in an attempt to retain ownership of their lands. Once the wars fought by Indigenous Australians are no longer open for consideration at the same level as those fought by post-colonial Australia, the path is open for non-Indigenous histories to take centre stage and create and legitimate a white Australia. As Lake argues:

Foreign battlefields have displaced frontier wars as sites of memory. Who cares whether Aboriginal people were dispossessed as a result of British settlement or that colonial history was marred by massacres? Real Australian history begins with Gallipoli, when Australian men joined the first Australian Imperial Force to fight overseas—not so much, it seems, for God and Empire as old memorials still somewhat embarrassingly insist—but for modern Australian freedom. And the men kept fighting for freedom during World War II, in Malaysia, Korea and Vietnam, in the Gulf, and now in Iraq.\textsuperscript{39}

The heroic qualities displayed by the Anzacs discussed previously, are able to replace any qualities Indigenous peoples have, and build an Australian identity based around white males. This is able to be reinforced continually through visual monuments commemorating white Australia and Australians, and reinforcing ties

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{35} Besley, ‘Intersection of History and Memory’.
\textsuperscript{36} Inglis, \textit{Sacred Places}, 502.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 104.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 104.
\textsuperscript{39} Lake, ‘Howard History’, 9.}
to Britain. Within this space, Indigenous people remain not as the first Australians with their own histories and knowledges, but as a people considered ‘too local to be local’. They ties to the land would de-legitimate white ties and as such, their wars to defend their land from colonisation are frequently overlooked or denied. Their presence on foreign battlefields fighting alongside white soldiers is frequently not included in the identity of the Anzacs or celebrated as strongly on Anzac Day. Fiona Nicoll makes this point by stating that rather than being memorialised in the Australian War Memorial as having lost their lives overseas, or defending their land from colonisation, instead, Indigenous heads are carved on the wall of the Australian War Memorial suggesting that they are somehow seen as trophies.

**Considering Indigenous Alternatives — Indigenous Wars and Memorials**

As the lack of recognition accorded to Indigenous people indicates, there is still a denial of both the contributions of Indigenous Australians to wars overseas (especially if such contributions exist in a framework which is ‘Indigenous’ rather than ‘white’) and the wars fought here in Australia over land and natural resources. Despite the denial by some white historians, ‘for Indigenous scholars and activists, and a growing number of non-Aboriginal historians, there is no doubt that the arrival of the British to the shores of this continent precipitated a military conflict, the legacy of which continues to inflect Australian race relations today’. This conflict is spoken about by Barbara Flick, who writes that:

> Within the first eight years of white settlement in New South Wales the Aboriginal population dropped from around forty thousand to less than six thousand people. This dramatic drop in our population had great impact on our families and communities. It is now an undisputed fact that the invaders slaughtered thousands of my people. Throughout this country of ours are many places where the remains of my people lay exposed to the elements. They lay where they fell. Men, women and children. The reason for this slaughter — the land was being cleared of Murris (us) for the growing of sheep and wheat.

Rose Wanganeen also speaks about the genocide of her peoples:

> There have been various forms of terrorism that were used against my people. They were conducted by the government in co-operation with the police and

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41 Nicoll, *Diggers to Drag Queens*, 176.
42 Ibid., 178.
bureaucracy. Terrorist acts have also been carried out by individuals and groups. The first form of terrorism was outright war and attempted genocide. When the act of genocide was practiced, the mentality was ‘Let’s start with the babies and children.’ These precious, innocent victims were buried up to their heads and then the soldiers proceeded to gallop over them with their horses, killing them. Another form of terrorism used was germ warfare. Diseases like smallpox were deliberately let loose on our communities. This tactic killed thousands of men, women and children, so that a round of ammunition was saved to kill the next black, who stole food to feed his family, just to survive. They then walked over the corpses to steal and lay claim to the land. Syphilis, pneumonia and other diseases were unleashed—we had no resistance to these foreign diseases.

Since no decisive records were kept of the numbers of Indigenous peoples who were killed in conflicts with the British, it is difficult to say just how many people lost their lives. Whilst many historians have tried to diminish the conflicts by looking at available figures and stating ‘facts’ (such as that only 118 people were killed on the Tasmanian frontier as Keith Windschuttle did or that one in ten children removed from their parents does not constitute a ‘generation’ as the conservative Howard government did), such number crunching is insulting and highly inappropriate. It could be argued that even one person taken from their parents on the basis of race, or one person killed in battle to take over land is too many, and this violence inherent in the colonisation process ought to be recognised and memorialised as an equally important part of the Australian nation and Australian history as is Anzac Day.

Despite these attempts to minimalise the colonisation process, Indigenous peoples do remember the massacres and battles their peoples experienced—as the above quotes indicate. However, Nora states, ‘memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition’ and continues ‘at the heart of history is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory. History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it’. This is illustrated through the many instances in which text-based European historical research (which is frequently prioritised as ‘official’ versions of history) tends to be suspicious of the memory of Indigenous Australians as demonstrated through their oral histories. Instead, ‘official’ versions of history would rather focus on the ‘facts’ as illustrated by white historical records made at the time. Whilst there are instances where this

is not the case (such as the *Bringing them Home Report* which frequently relied on oral testimony) there are still more which do prioritise white knowledges and histories over Indigenous ones (such as the decision made by the High Court in the *Yorta Yorta* application for recognition of native title over their traditional lands).

This prioritising of white knowledges over Indigenous histories frequently results in a situation in which, as Fiona Nicoll argues, ‘the colonial regime upholds its version of the truth by excluding Indigenous stories from consideration’. It is clear from the Australian memorial landscape that memorials to fallen white soldiers are far greater than those to Indigenous Australians. It could be argued that this is due to the fact that such memory-making of Anzacs representative of Australian identity (as discussed above) relies heavily on the denial of Indigenous Australians’ cultures, heritages and histories.

This exclusion is not always successful, however, and in some cases Indigenous Australians have managed to have their versions of history recognised and memorialised, and incorporated locally into mainstream Australian mythology. Elizabeth Furniss, in her work on the Kalkadoon people in Mount Isa, points to work which has related the Kalkadoon people to the Anzacs, arguing that the Kalkadoon were mythologised as the only Aboriginal group that could stand up against the white invaders. As such, she writes that the Kalkadoon went through a process of ‘Anzac-isation’ in local tourism and history articles, where the Kalkadoon people were frequently compared to the soldiers who fought at Gallipoli in terms of their bravery and courage. Despite this comparison to the Anzacs, however, Furniss writes that whilst various memorials have been erected to the Kalkadoon people who lost their lives fighting the European invasion, they have been received with mixed results and in many cases do not allow for stories which oppose the construction of the settlers as heroic.

Furniss’ argument illustrates the fact that, whilst the resistance of Indigenous Australians to European colonisation may be locally compared to myths such as Anzac Day, these stories are only able to function within a restricted space within which histories that challenge the myth of *terra nullius* are still highly contentious. This is illustrated by the relatively few memorials for Indigenous Australians,
and the fact that such memorials are frequently damaged. Similarly, in many cases these memorials recognise only achievements of Indigenous Australians which occurred in a white context (and frequently for white people) such as recognising Indigenous guides to white explorers. There are very few memorials to Indigenous resistance movements or Indigenous battles to reclaim their land. There are also relatively few memorials to those Indigenous Australians who lost their lives in any of the post-colonial wars fought overseas.

Yet despite this lack of recognition accorded to Indigenous resistance and the role of Indigenous soldiers within Australian defence forces, there are accounts of the engagements of Indigenous people, and there are some instances of memorials for these battles and the leading people who took part in them. Reed talks about work done by Indigenous peoples during the First World War, stating that although they were initially not allowed to enlist due to the fact that they were not actually recognised as ‘citizens’, many went ahead and signed up anyway. This was later changed, so that Indigenous men could enlist provided, ‘the examining medical officers were satisfied one of the parents is of European origin.’ Examples such as this demonstrate the lack of equality afforded Indigenous Australians during the First World War, and in many cases this is reflected in the lack of commemoration afforded them now. Whilst there has been some effort to recognise the contribution made by Indigenous men and women to the overseas wars Australia has fought, such stories rarely enter the national consciousness in Australia, and those Indigenous fighters are certainly not celebrated as being ‘typically’ Australian, nor are their histories memorialised and commemorated in the same way as those surrounding the Anzacs are.

In a similar way, there are many instances in which Indigenous people who lost their lives fighting frontier wars are only inadequately memorialised, if they are memorialised at all. This is illustrated in the example of the Coniston massacre which took place at Coniston in the Northern Territory in 1928. Official records show that thirty-one Aboriginal people were killed (although unofficially it is thought that more than one hundred people were murdered) in retaliation for the murder of a white man, Fred Brooks, by Aboriginal people. The Indigenous people killed in this massacre are memorialised, although not at any of the places where they lost their lives. Instead, the memorial stands at the place where Brooks

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53 Reed, Bigger Than Gallipoli, 147.
was killed. Read argues that the positioning of the monument here allows for it to be less ‘raw’ and confronting than if it were placed at one of the sites at which Indigenous peoples were murdered.\(^56\) This example illustrates, as mentioned above, the contentious nature of memorials commemorating those Indigenous Australians who lost their lives due to colonisation.

One of the only ‘official’ memorials to a massacre of Aboriginal people was built in memory of those who lost their lives at Myall Creek in 1838. Here twenty-eight or more Aboriginal people, mostly women and children, were rounded up out of a group of about forty or fifty who were camping in the area. All were killed, with some of the young women also raped. Seven of the settlers responsible for this horrendous massacre were later hanged, making this one of the very few times that white people were punished for murdering Indigenous Australians.\(^57\) A memorial was unveiled at Myall Creek in 2000 when hundreds of people—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—attended the unveiling.\(^58\) The memorial is a series of small boulders with both English and Gamilaraay inscriptions leading up to the main memorial which commemorates the people who lost their lives in the ‘unprovoked but premeditated act’.\(^59\)

Indigenous counter-memorials are also a growing area of memorials dedicated to recognise alternative histories to the dominant history of the settlement of Australia. Such memorials include the addition of an extra plaque in 1994 commemorating the deaths of Aboriginal people at the hands of white settlers to a monument erected in 1865 near Fremantle in honour of three settlers who died at the hands of Aboriginal people whilst on a punitive expedition.\(^60\) This monument has been repaired several times after being attacked with a sledge hammer.\(^61\)

Similar instances of the vandalism of Indigenous memorials occurred at the Kalkadoon memorial mentioned earlier, and at the bronze statue commemorating the warrior Yagan in Western Australia.\(^62\) Yagan was a key figure in the resistance of the Nyungar people against the colonisation of Swan River, and the community erected a statue in his honour in 1984. The statue caused controversy due to the fact that it depicted Yagan standing naked rather than clothed, and when Yagan’s head was returned to the Nyungar people from England in 1997 the

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\(^{59}\) Read, ‘The Truth’, 35.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 31.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 31.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 32.
statue was beheaded. Again, these examples illustrate the controversial nature of Indigenous war memorials existing in the Australian landscape and further point to the fact that the recognition of the violence enacted against Indigenous Australians during colonisation, or of Aboriginal people’s fights to retain their land, remain highly contentious.

Debates about the memorialisation of Indigenous peoples’ participation in war are complicated by the fact that there is argument about the ways in which Indigenous peoples ought to be memorialised. Batten and Batten point out that in many instances more natural forms of commemoration are considered to be more appropriate than British ways of commemoration such as statues and sculpture. In many cases the form the memorial takes ought to be reflective of its purpose (some memorials may be educative in which case they may take a more European form, and others may be places of healing and reflection, in which case, they may take a more natural form such as a garden). However, regardless of the form of commemoration, it is clear that Indigenous peoples are still not commemorated in the same way or to the same extent as the Anzacs, nor are they attributed the same influence in the national identity.

**CONCLUSION**

Despite the existence and growing awareness of alternate accounts of Australia within the archive these histories do not receive the same mythologising as do the histories of the Anzacs fighting battles overseas. Nor are Indigenous characteristics attributed the same importance in the creation of Australian identity. Instead, Indigenous peoples are largely overlooked altogether in descriptions of Australia, which instead foregrounds white males fighting overseas. As Banerjee and Osuri argue:

> We would like to point out that the ritualistic placing of death at the heart of the formation of the nation has been consistently a masculinist project displayed in the icons of the war memorial or calendric markers which are often gendered or racialised. Marking Aboriginal massacres as sacred in national memory, while they are already part of the histories of Aboriginal communities, would not only begin that healing process for all Australians and rewrite contemporary narratives of Australian nationhood from an indigenous location, but also begin to address the exclusions of masculinist narratives of the nation.

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63 Batten and Batten, ‘Memorialising the Past’, 98–99.
64 Ibid., 107.
65 Ibid., 107.
66 Banerjee and Osuri, ‘Silences of the Media’, 279.
The relative lack of commemoration or recognition of Indigenous histories of war illustrates the fact that such histories are not accorded the same importance nor legitimated to the same extent as white Australia’s participation in wars such as the First World War. The continuing emphasis on Anzac Day as ‘the birth of the nation’ denies the existence of an Indigenous nation prior to colonisation and functions to build a nation which is based on a white, male identity. Similarly, the fact that many memorials which are built in memory of Indigenous Australians are either the subject of contention or are vandalised further indicates that the recognition of Indigenous ties to land and the culpability of white Australia in the massacres and dispossession of Indigenous people remain threatening to the future legitimacy of the white nation.

As such, recognition of the wars fought by and against Indigenous Australians, and of the violence which is inherent in the colonisation of Australia, needs to be made in order for honest and productive future relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to exist. Memorials, in all their forms, must reflect the many and varied characteristics of the Australian identity and past, and must function to recognise both Indigenous and non-Indigenous histories.

In Geocorpographies of Torture Joseph Pugliese documents an exhibition held in 1998 by Aboriginal curators Tess McLennan-Allas and Aaron Ross documenting the magnitude of the violence of colonisation. He speaks of the powerful image accompanying this exhibition in the form of a banner headline, asking the compelling question: ‘Why can’t we have the “Lest We Forget?”’ Such a question illustrates how selective the white Australian nation is in remembering those who died in defending their country, and how prioritising a group of people, such as the white ‘Aussie’ Anzac is frequently done at the expense of another group of people, such as the First Australians. In order for the nation to move forward, a national identity needs to be developed which encompasses not only white male sacrifice and white male characteristics. Many Indigenous Australians are working towards this already, and have been doing so ever since their country was invaded two hundred years ago. As Barbara Flick states; ‘I say again. We have never accepted colonisation. We have learned to survive’.

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68 Flick, ‘Colonisation and Decolonisation’, 64.