

# Critical Race and Whiteness Studies

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## **Notes on Captain Cook's Gambling Habit: Settling Accounts of White Possession**

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*This article brings critical race and whiteness theory and gambling studies together with recent academic 'history experiments' to engage with a field of academic research surrounding the figure of Captain Cook. An investigation of how 'Cook culture' is refracted through everyday practices, spaces and products of gambling highlights a habitus of white possession which continues to define Australian belonging against Indigenous sovereignty claims. I show how the belief that Cook, as an agent of history, couldn't have done otherwise in his first encounters with Indigenous people in this place renders non-Indigenous people incapable of being otherwise than subjects of white possession. After linking processes of white home-making to a gambling logic implicit to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the *illusio*, I conclude with personal reflections to illustrate the role of fantasy in sustaining everyday manifestations of Cook Culture.*

What does the non-recognition of Indigenous sovereignty impart about the constitution, currency and circulation of white possession? (Moreton-Robinson 2009:28).

### **Introduction**

Completed two years prior to the bicentennial celebrations planned to mark 200 years of British settlement in Australia in 1988, *Babakueria* (1986) is an early example of the now familiar 'mockumentary' genre of film and television. With a treaty or other form of 'compact' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian still on the agenda of serious federal political debate, the bicentennial celebrations became the focus of significant political activism. Massive protests were held in Sydney by Indigenous activists and non-Indigenous supporters to assert Indigenous rights and to dispute the narrative of national settlement being re-enacted and celebrated. *Babakueria*

refers explicitly to this context at the beginning of the narrative. The invasion of a harmonious white society based on recreation activities and a staple diet of beer and burned meat is depicted with the arrival of a boat of armed Aboriginal soldiers who promptly take possession of the land. After asking the natives what they 'call this place', they decide to retain a version of its quaint native name: 'Barbeque Area'. Through a series of ingenious imaginative scenarios devised by writer Geoffrey Atherden and superb acting by the key cast members of police superintendent (Kevin Smith), presenter and investigative journalist (Michelle Torres) and the sinister Minister for White Affairs (Bob Maza), *Babakueria* brilliantly captures the *habitus* of white possession with which this article is concerned.

A scene shot inside a TAB shop is suggestive of how everyday cultural practices of gambling derive from and reproduce Captain Cook's possessive gamble against Indigenous property rights. Why, wonders *Babakueria's* investigative journalist of white culture, do groups of men gather in these shops and exchange money for tokens?

Investigative Journalist: Their austere design, the complete lack of decoration or adornment gives no clue to the large sums of money, which pass through these doors everyday, as the followers of this religion exchange their donations for more prayer tokens. We can see some of the worshippers now as they stand, heads bowed in deep reverence, listening to incantations broadcast over the television set and study the details of their prayer tokens.

[The race is screened and shot from the point of view of the television so that we see faces gazing upwards towards us]

And then they pray, they pray for success, for wealth, for happiness. They believe that the course of their lives will be foretold by watching some trained horses run around a large circle. Strange isn't it that at the end of the broadcast we saw many people tear up their tokens and throw them away. But if you thought this action indicated a loss of faith in their religion, you'd be wrong. Many of these people will be back here tomorrow to exchange new donations for more prayer tokens. What simple faith!

Invoking the idea of 'simplicity' is comically effective here because it evokes a binary opposition between 'complex civilizations' and 'primitive cultures' from which the white anthropological voice parodied by the investigative journalist derives its authority. As David Theo Goldberg (2009) argues, an implicit opposition between complex and simple societies continues to subtend neoliberal discourses of racial difference, albeit in 'cultural' or 'historical' rather than discredited 'biological' terms. This opposition can be observed operating in 'postcolonial' scholarship on Cook whenever Indigenous responses to his being and legacies are dismissed as simply (and it is implied, unfashionably) oppositional. The following exploration of gambling's role in shaping the possessive subject of white states will suggest that maybe things are *less* complex than Cook scholars (of both anthropological and historical flavors) would care to acknowledge.

Goldberg defines 'white states' as those which have 'the design or effects of ... (re)produce[ing], manag[ing], and sustain[ing] overall the conditions and structures across all dimensions of social, political, economic, legal and cultural life of the relative power, privilege, and properties of whites (2003: 196). Preempting the objection that 'race' has been 'moved beyond' in a post-civil rights, post Apartheid era, he argues that 'White privilege reigns whether the social conditions it signifies are taken to be 'non-white states' or (in some idealized, normative sense) *raceless* states' (96). Within a nominally 'raceless state', like Australia, the term 'non-Indigenous' often appears to be a neutral and inclusive category even as it is predominantly wielded by and in the interests of Australians racialized as white. Australian critical race and whiteness theorists<sup>i</sup> have shown that contemporary expressions of whiteness are as likely to take the form of valuing the cultural inheritance of the Irish or the political and legal institutions bequeathed by Britain (See Moreton-Robinson 2005; Haggis and Schech 1999) as the violent protests at Cronulla beach against Australians of 'middle-Eastern appearance' in the white enclave of the Sutherland Shire in Sydney which captured world media attention in 2005 (See Nicoll and Moreton-Robinson 2006; Perera 2006). It is also important for the following argument to note that white states are not always or necessarily exclusive of citizens racialized as non-white; they may actively solicit the investment of such citizens in 'having a multicultural society' (See Hage 2005).

To the extent that Australia continues to function as a white state, our institutions and subjective dispositions are shaped by what Aileen Moreton-Robinson has defined as the 'possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty'. She argues that this logic '...works ideologically, that is it operates at the level of beliefs, and discursively at the level of epistemology, to naturalize the nation as a white possession ... [and it] is predicated on exclusion; that is it denies and refuses what it does not own - the sovereignty of the Indigenous other' (2004a para 5). The absence of a legitimate foundation of British sovereignty, and the white state that subsequently came to encompass this continent, is a problem that frames the following consideration of everyday spaces, products and practices of gambling.

I find it useful to approach 'patriarchal white sovereignty' as *habitus* defined by Pierre Bourdieu as 'this sense of what "can-be" which tends to produce practices objectively adjusted to the possibilities, in particular by orienting the perception and evaluation of the possibilities inscribed in the present situation.' In this context our investment in the game of society (or the "*illusio*") requires the relationship between subjective expectations and objective possibilities to be neither absolute (always winning) nor nil (always losing) (2000: 213). This article explores gambling's role in maintaining a *habitus* of white possession which continues to define Australian belonging against Indigenous sovereignty claims. It shows how a national *illusio* is sustained through the belief that Cook, as an agent of history, couldn't have been or done otherwise in his first encounters with Indigenous people and

demonstrates how this belief renders non-Indigenous subjects incapable of being and doing otherwise than as subjects of white possession.

### **On Picking up (on) Things from the Intersection of Cook Culture and Gambling**

The challenge in attempting to interrupt Cook as a historical figure is that he already works through replication and chaotic proliferation that solemnly monumentalize him with a fake reason and at the same time popularize him in delirious rhyme (2008:43).

– Katrina Schlunke

In forging links between Captain Cook and gambling my method is inspired by Katrina Schlunke to understand how 'history ... works through people and things to produce a force of knowing that makes itself at home in specific skin' (2008: 44). My approach is also shaped by Stephen Muecke's useful meta-historical suggestions for cultural studies researchers working with the figure of Captain Cook. Rather than approaching Cook simply as the object of competing representations and as the subject of human(ist) agency in and on 'the world', he suggests that 'Cook culture' might also be studied synchronically by looking at contiguous things and happenings within broader assemblages of history:

...Cook has had one foot, as it were, well and truly out of history for a long time, and has spread far and wide in the spaces of culture. When you encounter him metonymically as an Endeavour in the name of a high school in the Sydney suburb of Rockdale, or as a miniature *Endeavour* in a bottle, or as the name of a convenience store, history is not the narrative that comes to mind. It is something more cultural like a sense of identity or belonging (2008: 39).

Muecke suggests further that focusing on the performative work of language might cultivate sensitivity to the magical effects of contiguity in those things and places touched by Cook and by which we are touched in turn as well as to the contagious spread of Cook culture (2008: 40). I extend Muecke's method slightly by framing my research as an exercise both in 'picking up things' and in 'picking *up on* things' about Cook culture made possible by an eye for gambling and a commitment to supporting Indigenous sovereignty claims in Australia.

Below is a list of some of the things I have picked up on at the intersection of Cook culture and gambling and through which I will weave the strands of an argument about relations of sovereignty, willpower and possession.

- 'Captain Cook's Tavern', a suburban pub attached to a shopping mall in the outer Brisbane suburb of Redcliffe advertising the entertainment of 'TAB, KINO and POKIES'.
- A pokie jackpot called 'Captain\$ Ca\$h' and other games related to Cook culture through a racialising 'family resemblance'.

- My childhood memories of induction to Cook culture through Captain Cook's Cottage in Melbourne.

In the manner of Muecke's 'new historian' I am guided in this selection of things and memories by 'questions of *what is most urgently at stake*' (2008:40) in the present. Approaching Cook and gambling, Cook as a gambler, and Cook as the object or stake of gambling raises broader questions about unresolved relations of sovereignty between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. How can the passive way that non-Indigenous Australians 'come into possession' through a national inheritance of whiteness be reconciled with narratives of will and effort and rationality tied to figures such as Cook, the miner, the pioneer and the digger? What are the cultural processes which enable Indigenous Australian dispossession to be rendered as the 'bad luck' carried by 'historical tides' and disarticulated from non-Indigenous agencies past and present? How might a focus on gambling and Cook contribute to existing accounts of various interests at play in the serious if not 'rational' game of colonization? What new understandings might it generate of gambling's enduring popularity and of the role played by Cook in sustaining a sense of white possession in contemporary Australia? Before addressing these questions I want to explore the implications of historical narratives of first encounter which assume that Cook couldn't have done other than he did.

### **How Many Captain Cooks?**

When Cook deployed racialised discourse to mark the "Indigenous Other" as will-less and black he is producing through knowledge a subject of his own making, one that he interprets for himself. This process violates the subjectivity of Indigenous people by obliterating any trace of our ontological or epistemological existence (Moreton-Robinson 2009: 32).

Captain James Cook's 'discovery' of Australia occurred at a moment in the Western European cultural formation when the relationship between the spheres of theory and practice which were to become clearly distinguished as 'gambling' and 'finance' was a subject of heated political and philosophical debate. Joint stock companies were formed, such as the South Sea Company, to support an imperial trade in slaves and commodities. As Marieke De Goede explains 'It was the long-term time horizons and uncertainties involved in colonial voyages that underpinned financial innovations such as shares and insurance.' (2005: 4) Ian Hacking describes an epistemological shift as the development of sciences of probability during this period promised governments, institutions and individuals the capacity to 'tame chance' (1990). Gerda Reith identifies a paradox within probability science insofar as 'it did not tackle the *pure* form of chance but instead redefined the parameters of the debate into a form which could be made sense of by science. Probability dealt with chance by abstracting reality to such an extent that it was no longer relevant to any specific moment or situation. In the law of large numbers it could safely make pronouncements as to what *should* happen in the long term, but never what *would* happen

next' (1999:32). Certainly, Cook's voyages were on the pointy end of probability calculations, entailing many unpredictable factors including the turning of tides, the availability of winds, the presence of deep harbours for landing and the willingness of Indigenous people to accommodate European commercial and political interests in their territories. If Cook most often appears to us as an exemplary product of 'the age of reason' and the deliberative nature of his voyages are emphasized over their inherently chancy aspects, it is at least partly because of the role he has been given retrospectively as a central protagonist within national historical narratives.

The historical sense that is made of Cook has ongoing implications for the claims to rights and property made by descendents of both colonizing and colonized people in Australia. As Chris Healey argues, the name of Cook:

... has been used by Aboriginal people as a means of accounting for certain kinds of change and as a metaphor for ethical dilemmas. In these ways Cook can be considered a term which creates a possibility of dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of making histories... (1997 np)

While explicitly rejecting a single historical account of the man and navigator sought by the former Howard government for the purpose of national celebration, it is important to recognize that partial truths exist within the spectrum of stories that have been and will continue to be told about Cook.

It is in an apparently pluralist spirit that Nicholas Thomas' study *Cook* argues against univocal historical representations of Cook which 'define what has happened since' (2003: 413). While conceding that '... Cook was in the business of dispossession: he claimed inhabited islands and lands right around the Pacific for the Crown', Thomas warns:

...when we damn Cook for inaugurating the business of colonization, we are in underlying agreement with traditional Cook idealizers – we are seeing the explorer above all as a founder or precursor, and judging him according to how we judge what happened afterwards. He is history's man. This book aims to step behind the false certainties of both the heroic and anti-heroic biographies of this navigator, to deal with the messy actualities of the past. Cook's voyages were not blameless humanitarian ventures, nor were they purely invasive... but there is no doubt that Cook was ... the single most important European protagonist in Oceania in the eighteenth century' (2003: xxxvi).

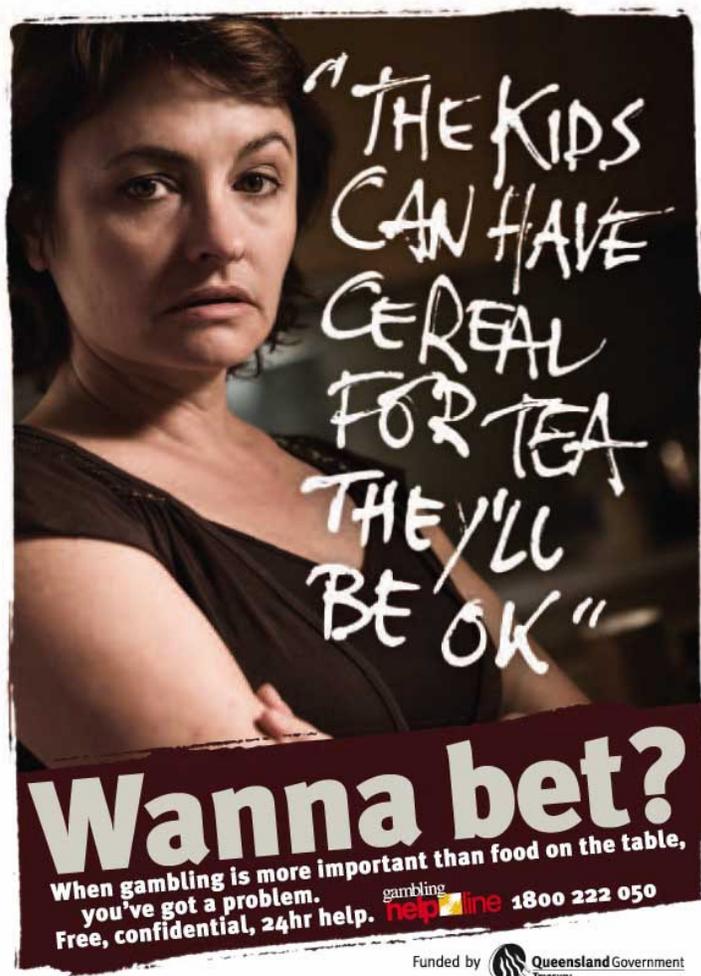
Like other authors of contact histories and ethnographic studies of Indigenous experience of 'encounter', Thomas cites Paddy Wainburranga's bark painting titled 'Too many Captain Cooks' to 'sum up' the attitude of Australian Aborigines, Hawaiian nationalists and Pacific Islanders for whom Cook appears as a 'relentlessly violent figure...' (2003: xxxiii) However Schlunke's reading of this story suggests that Wainburranga's story is not so straightforward for Indigenous people, entailing two interlinked versions of Cook's arrival. In the first version, the explorer arrives from the North and travels around Australia with his two wives and, after an epic struggle with the devil, is eventually

spearred by relatives and buried on Garden Island in Sydney Harbor. In the second version, a new lot of Captain Cooks arrive, bringing 'warfare' and 'welfare' and wanting to have 'anything they could get' (2009: 2-3). This story's articulation of a relationship between an original Captain Cook and the new Captain Cooks who arrived without regard for Indigenous lives and property suggests ethical issues entailed in *not* damning Cook at least partly on the basis of his legacies for Indigenous people in Australia and the Pacific. Rather than deploying Wainburranga's work descriptively as a shorthand way of dismissing those who would pass moral judgment on 'the messy actualities of the past', it is possible to read 'Too many Captain Cooks', in part, as a judgment passed by Indigenous subjects to whom subsequent generations and descendants of non-Indigenous migrants are ethically accountable. At stake in this distinction is whether 'too many' is taken primarily as an epistemological statement about historiography (that there are too many versions of Cook's story to decide which is correct) or an epistemological and ontological statement articulated from the standpoint of Indigenous sovereignty (that too many Captain Cooks are a problem).

Moreton-Robinson presents Cook both as a 'white man of modernity' and as an individual subject who made a willful decision, against the orders of the Royal Society which commissioned his voyage, not to gain consent for possession from the natives he encountered. She illustrates her argument that 'possessiveness functions socio-discursively, informing and shaping white subjectivity and the law' (2009: 28) through a comparative reading of Indigenous and non-Indigenous records of 'first encounters' between Cook and the *Bubu Gujin* clan in Northern Queensland. Hostilities that broke out after clan members tried to reclaim turtles captured by the ship's crew highlight contested possession as an issue from the outset of Cook's encounters. When these concrete struggles of will are remembered, Thomas' positioning of Cook condemners and Cook celebrators on the same ground seems less convincing. Different cultural expressions of Cook can be explored which acknowledge the 'messy actualities' of the past *and* address ethical issues arising from continuing struggles between the possessive prerogatives of whiteness and the counter claims of Indigenous sovereignties today.

Thomas notes that Cook's decision not to gain permission from the natives to land and take possession of the continent, his 'impulsive imperialism', was accompanied by a lengthy reflection about 'the Natives of New-Holland'. His journal entry, written on Possession Island, emphasized the tranquility, happiness and egalitarian aspects of the natives' lives and presents this as the reason '...they seemed to set no value on any one article we could offer them; this in my opinion argues that they think themselves provided with all the necessaries of Life and that they have no superfluities' (Cook cited in Thomas 2003: 128). Like the cultural warriors of the Howard-era who took any evidence of Indigenous entitlement as being 'too much' and as an implied threat to the happiness of ordinary Australians, Cook's diary entry cites the imagined plentitude of native life as sufficient grounds for the denial of Indigenous sovereignty.

British political theorists including Hobbes and Locke saw continents that the Empire claimed for settlement as *terra nullius*; the absence of private property, land and animal husbandary and money were cited as evidence against Indigenous sovereignty. This construction of Indigenous country as a 'state of nature' formed the basis for what Carole Pateman and Charles Mills call 'a racial as well as a social contract. The Native peoples are not part of the settler contract – but they are henceforth subject to it, and their lives, lands and nations are reordered by it' (2007: 56). Cook's defiance of his instructions to gain consent of the natives before claiming possession can be understood in light of this forthcoming contract (2007: 63). It meant that an important opportunity was missed for negotiated terms of consent or outright refusal on the part of Indigenous people to be registered in the colony's foundations. To put it another way, Cook's failure to address the matter of Indigenous consent installed *terra nullius* at the constitutional heart of the settler-colonial nation to come.



**Figure 1** Responsible Gambling Poster, Queensland Government.  
<http://www.olgr.qld.gov.au/resources/responsibleGamblingDocuments/ResponsibleGamblingSignageAllSectors.pdf>

To consider Cook's coming to possession in Australia is to reflect on how racialized habits of power construct particular accounts of individual and collective subjects of will. When I think about why all the Cooks that followed in the wake of the first Cook cling so stubbornly to fantasies either of Indigenous plentitude (romantic constructions of the noble savage) or pathology (ignoble constructions) I am reminded of discourses of 'addiction' which construct individuals as deprived of their willpower and enslaved to the desire or need for a process or substance. Refracted through the discursive lens of addiction, Cook's failure to carry out his instructions to gain consent for his possessive claim resonates with the denial process ascribed to gambling addicts. For example, a 'Responsible Gambling' poster placed in Queensland pokie venues depicts a mother who goes out for groceries to feed her family but loses the money in a poker machine en-route reassuring herself by saying 'The kids will be ok. They can have cereal for dinner.' This is one way of reading Cook's reassurances to himself in his journal at the point of proclaiming possession of Australia. *If* the natives have everything they need and do not value anything of ours in any case *then* Cook and his British masters have everything to gain and nothing to lose by maximizing their possessive scope in this place. Perhaps Cook thought, felt and believed, like the addict in the Responsible Gambling ad, he somehow *had* to claim possession, regardless of evidence of Indigenous sovereignty, which he encountered. And perhaps, for those of us who are non-Indigenous beneficiaries of Cook's possession, our settled sense of belonging in Australia requires us to think, feel and believe that he *had* to do what he did.

In the remainder of this article I will show how discursive practices of gambling illuminate collective investments in a fantasy of legitimate settlement that we are complicit in reproducing as the inheritors of property bequeathed through Cook's compulsive willfulness. I have suggested that invoking 'the messy actualities of history' can work to prevent us from addressing the equally messy actualities of the present from which future race relations will take shape. Rather than relegating questions about the rights and wrongs of his way of coming to and of taking possession of Indigenous countries to the past, recognition of the living legacies of Cook's willful choice (from stolen country to stolen children and wages) might become the ethical ground for effective redistributive actions in the present and future on the part of the living beneficiaries of this choice. Now I wouldn't bet on this happening. And this is not because I am not a betting woman (I am!). But to wager on the probability of future social justice outcomes is as disingenuously passive as contemplating how the worlds of Indigenous people in Australia and the Pacific would have been different had Cook not arrived at the time and in the way that he did. It is to perpetuate white possession through a refusal to recognize our active part in the history of Cook that is happening now. As Moreton-Robinson points out, Cook's legacy continues to animate the institutions within which Indigenous rights claimants negotiate today: 'the legislative and administrative arrangements that circumscribe Indigenous 'ownership' in its current forms, effectively reduce it to hunting and gathering rights and some rights of residence. This resonates with Cook's assumption

that Indigenous people continue to live in a state of nature with a sense of property that is confined to our immediate needs' (2009: 38-39) Below cultural practices, spaces and products of gambling will provide a lens to understand how the Australia nation has been and continues to be constituted through 'preferred' patterns of migration.

### **Playing Inside the Captain Cook Tavern: Britishness and the Symbolic Capital of Whiteness**

Contemporary and historical narratives of Britishness and Australian national identity reveal that the values [of virtue, intelligence, resilience, loss and hard work] required to establish the nation as a white possession are those that were also required to dispossess Indigenous people of their lands. That these values can be linked across generations of those who trace their ancestry through British-ness is evidence of the perseverance of a white national identity and its possessiveness (Moreton-Robinson 2004b: 9)

Manifestations of 'Cook culture' in spaces, practices and products of gambling demonstrate how the symbolic capital of whiteness shapes what Michael Billing calls 'banal nationalism': 'ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced' (1995: 6). In contrast to cultural, economic, educational and social capital, Bourdieu argues that symbolic capital encompasses corporeal attributes of which individuals are inescapably bearers such as race and gender. He associates symbolic capital with pre-capitalist social formations where embodied prestige rather than the abstract form of currency lies at the centre of social organization. Symbolic capital thus imposes limits on the capacity of individuals to enact everyday processes of 'conversion' whereby, for example, economic capital is transformed into educational or cultural capital. He writes:

[E]ntry into life ... starts with an assignment of identity designating a category, a class, an ethnic group, a sex, or for racist eyes, a 'race'. The social world is essentialist, and one has that much less chance of escaping the manipulation of aspirations and subjective expectations when one is symbolically more deprived, less consecrated or more stigmatized, and therefore less well placed in the competition for the 'esteem of men', as Pascal put it....'(2000: 238)

As a form of symbolic capital, I'd argue that race continues to play an important role in capitalist social formations shaped by the legacies of settler-colonialism. To the extent that being non-Indigenous and passing as white continues to confer symbolic capital in Australia, this not only shapes *habitus* in conjunction with other axes of subjectification. It also structures the national *illusio* like gambling's 'house' by ensuring that losing in the competitive games of society – even when one is in possession of economic, educational, cultural and social capital - is more likely for some racialized subjects than others.



**Figure 2** Captain Cook Tavern, Redcliffe, Brisbane. Photograph: Fiona Nicoll, 2009



**Figure 3** Captain\$ Ca\$h pokie jackpot. Photograph: Katrina Schlunke, 2008

I first encountered Captain Cook's Tavern in the suburb of Redcliffe en-route to view an independently produced Australian feature film *Blessed* (2009) by Ana Kokkinos which includes one of the few scenes in Australian cinema set in a pokie lounge. I was struck by how the signage advertising Kino, TAB and Pokies seemed to belong so 'naturally' to an establishment named after the mythical 'discoverer' of Australia as well as how the choice of the name 'tavern' rather than the more usual terms 'hotel' or 'public bar' seemed to reinforce a sense of Captain Cook's Britishness. Redcliffe is a significant site of colonial history in Brisbane; it also has a 'Captain Cook Park' due to the

area being part of the mainland mentioned in Cook's journal of his voyage through Moreton Bay. In 1799 the area was revisited by the navigator Mathew Flinders where it was the scene of interracial violence in which two Indigenous people were killed at a nearby site that was named 'Skirmish Point'. Originally intended as the site of the penal colony for which purpose Brisbane was established, Redcliffe was abandoned by colonists and later by German missionaries partly due to ongoing conflicts with the settled owners of the area, the Ningy-Ningy (Evans 1999: 52).

Cook culture extends beyond the naming of the Captain Cook Tavern to encompass the iconography of gambling products that consumers are likely to encounter when they walk through its doors and those of Australia's numerous gaming venues. One of the most semantically rich forms of gambling, electronic gaming machines (henceforth referred to as 'pokies') have proliferated since deregulation in most states. Richard Woolley and Charles Livingstone examine the particular quality of consumption that is provided by the pokie. They argue that its provision of:

... 'immersion in a continuous flow or "a stream of indeterminacy", makes available a 'relatively "open" space for meaning-making activity'... Such activity occurs not in a vacuum, but in response to the conditions under which humans live, and, as an extension and adoption of the already given, the socio-historical circumstances under which people make the most of their lives (2010: 52-58).

It is in relation to the iconography of pokies that the specific historical circumstances which link individuals to socio-cultural formations can be most clearly observed.

The use of gendered tropes of colonialism is a striking aspect of pokie machine iconography. To walk into a pokie lounge in any Australian gaming venue is to encounter innumerable images of warriors without war, miners without taxes or native title negotiations and white male explorers of every 'exotic' locale. Prominent images are reclining pacific beauties, noble savages, geishas smiling enigmatically behind fans and hidden treasure troves and gold deposits. While many of these nostalgic and exotically themed games are produced by 'Aristocrat', an Australian company launched in the early 1950s, others are produced by its competitor, International Gaming Technologies, a US based manufacturer. On a very basic level, Aboriginalist and Orientalist iconography in Australian poker machine and gaming venue design seems to appeal to and reinforce a sense of white national belonging anchored to celebratory settler-colonial narratives.

Captain\$ Ca\$h is a flouro-lit cartoon image of a bewigged explorer wearing eighteenth century naval headgear in a boat splashing happily in coins and benign white-capped waves. He looks like the kind of Cook that might have been dreamt up by Warner Brothers or Disney cartoonists. The pokie in the middle of the jackpot over which he presides is Aristocrat's extremely popular 'Indian Dreaming' game which features kitsch icons such as dream-weavers

and stern-faced chiefs in feathered head-dress and triggers a sound track of low pitched chanting when free games are won. Cook's legacy also seems evident in IGT's popular 'Major Money' series of games and linked jackpots which feature a pith helmeted, lantern jawed explorer in a range of exotic global environments, from Egypt and South America to the Australian 'outback'. I'd also link the character of 'Rich Uncle Penny Bags', adapted from the board game 'Monopoly' for pokie machines, to Cook culture through its emphatic British-ness. Described by Macau based *World Gaming* magazine as the 'most famous board game the West has ever produced' and as having 'moulded many a business man over the decades' (2011: 56-61), 'Monopoly' is both an apt description and a performative practice of the values of patriarchal white sovereignty in Australia and other settler colonies. That the consumer of pokies is constructed as implicitly non-Indigenous is evident not only in the representation of Indigenous people and countries through strong discourses of 'primitivism' within pokie venues but also in broader discourses of pathological gambling which circulate around Indigenous gambling consumers.

Intersections of race, gender, class and Indigeneity in Australia are undeniably complicated. However, at the very least, the pokie iconography I have discussed seems to invite a level of resignation or 'reconciliation' to a settled order of race relations of which Cook is a master-signifier. Within this settled order it is not necessary for non-Indigenous Australians to actively claim privileges or rights as national subjects – these passively accrue to us from institutions and legal decisions enabled by Cook's declaration of British sovereignty in 1770. As a corollary, it is not necessary for Indigenous subjects to actively make native title claims to their country to know that recognition for most claims will be precluded in advance by the Crown's assumption of the right to extinguish Indigenous rights where 'settled' title already exists. Agency in the field of race relations comes into play only when non-Indigenous Australians willfully demand the right *not* to benefit from the occupation of Indigenous countries that were never ceded and when Indigenous Australians refuse to accept the premise of extinguishment and contest the rights of Australian Courts to rule justly on the issue of sovereignty (See Falk and Martin and Foley 2007).

A focus on enduring dimensions of white privilege as well as actual and perceived threats to it is required to understand Cook's capacity to engage individuals within gambling's 'democracy of chance' (Reith 2007: 37). Migrants' capacity to experience social hope through the figure of Cook is mediated by what Aileen Moreton-Robinson describes as 'Anglocentric whiteness':

...Anglocentric whiteness [became] the definitive marker of citizenship and as a form of property born of social status to which others were deprived access including Indigenous people ... The Anglocentric culture of Australia shares features consistent with other white Western societies and is a powerful producer of national identity shaping ideologies of individualism, egalitarianism, mateship and citizenship(2004: 79).

Anglocentric whiteness was implicit in discourses of border control to which both major political parties appealed during the 2010 election campaign. In contrast to legal immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa and Afghani 'boatpeople' who were identified by focus groups in some electorates as 'undesirable' arrivals, Labor leader, Julia Gillard, and her Liberal opponent, Tony Abbott, both white immigrants to Australia from the UK, were accepted as unproblematic embodiments of different ideological versions of 'Australian values'. These naturalized relationships between British-ness, national identity, and possession<sup>ii</sup> provide a clear context within which to understand Cook's function within Australian gambling discourses and material culture.

To understand how gambling mediates racialized relations of sovereignty, it is important to disaggregate white subjectivity and statehood from the wider category of 'non-Indigenous' Australians who collectively benefit from Cook's dispossessing claim of British sovereignty. Government policies and academic and popular discourses of multiculturalism in Australia have tended to focus on racialized others as a potential or actual threat to 'ordinary Australians'.<sup>iii</sup> Ghassan Hage diagnoses a condition of 'paranoid nationalism' in the face of economic and cultural processes of globalization in Australia. Refusing a comfortable social distinction between relatively affluent and 'tolerant' white people and their (allegedly) racist underclass counterparts, he highlights instead the *conditional* terms on which national belonging is extended by *all white Australians* as a gift to 'third world looking people' (2003: 21). In this context Hage poses the following questions about collective responsibility for the impact on Indigenous people of past practices of colonialism - on one hand - and the participatory belonging of migrants racialized as non-white - on the other:

Is there a difference between the migrant saying 'these events do not concern me' and the established Australian citizen saying the same thing, but on different grounds? Can a migrant relate affectively to a past that is not his or her own? Can a migrant ever genuinely care for the nation without such an identification with its past? Can he or she ever experience the same intense sense of participatory belonging that people who are assumed to identify more fully with the past feel? (2003: 83)

He concludes that non-Anglo migrants' experience of communal solidarity and being cared for is a pre-condition for 'identifying with all or some of [the nation's] we and we's and all the affective baggage they carry with them' (2003: 100). This means that Cook only becomes an ethical problem for migrants to the extent that they experience an equal sense of belonging with descendents of the First Fleet. Hage cites the macabre sense of humor with which two Arab-Australian youths expressed this at a community event: 'If the Anglos didn't do the killing you wouldn't have been able to emigrate here. You owe 'em mate. They cleared the land ...ESPECIALLY FOR YOU!' (2003: 100). The inclusion of Arab-Australians within a national 'we' here provides the mythical basis for the disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty through which ordinary Australian citizenship is performed. This disavowal is the price of

entry to 'Captain Cook's Tavern' and the possibility of social mobility promised to punters by the Captain\$ Ca\$h jackpot.

### **Remembering Captain Cook's Cottage**

The social world is not a game of chance, a discontinuous series of perfectly independent events like the spins of a roulette wheel...Those who talk of equality of opportunity forget that social games – the economic game, but also the cultural games ... are not "fair games." Without being, strictly speaking, rigged, the competition resembles a handicap race that has lasted for generations or games in which each player has the positive or negative scores of all those who have preceded him, that is, the cumulated scores of all his ancestors (Bourdieu 2000: 214-15).



**Figure 4** Captain Cook's Cottage, Fitzroy Gardens, Melbourne. Photograph: Fiona Nicoll 2010

I began this article by exploring Cook's decision not to gain consent prior to claiming the East Coast of Australia in relation to Moreton-Robinson's question 'what does the non-recognition of Indigenous sovereignty impart about the constitution of white possession?' She not only clearly poses the problem as one related to Cook's will, but preempts invocations of the 'messy actualities of the past' which would infinitely defer the answering of her question. This section will link gambling's economic logic of 'the house' to our most 'personal' investments in material and emotional aspects of homemaking. Drawing on Bourdieu's essay 'Social Being, Time and the Sense of Existence', I will explain how an intergenerational sense of belonging within the nation is produced and reproduced on the foundations of white settler colonialism.

Inspired by Pascal's famous wager on the existence of God, Bourdieu considers the wager that individuals within modern secular states place on the value of society as such which he refers to as the *illusio*. By this he means not only an almost spiritual belief in the value of competitions within different social fields of endeavour, but also a more fundamental confidence in 'the forthcoming', in the most banal senses of getting up and going to work in the morning and of having one's investment of time socially recognized and valued. The *illusio* can be distinguished from garden-variety illusions by its social rather than individual basis. While an illusion of grandeur can be a deeply personal matter, the *illusio* requires concordance between subjective and social schemes of value and understanding; it is objective to the extent that one's sense of grandeur is *shared* by relevant social others. With reference to my childhood memories of Cook culture, I will argue that it is through the figure of 'the house' that gambling's intimate connection with the *illusio* is expressed and experienced as opposed to Indigenous sovereignty claims.

In auto-ethnographic reflections on a research trip to Possession Island, Schlunke highlights the strangeness both of the way, and of the place from which, Cook made his possessive claim to a continent from an island. Recounting her experience of a place so apparently hostile and disconnected from the everyday comforts conferred by white possession on the 'mainland', Schlunke considers the power of Cook culture to comfort. She cites a scene in Michael Gow's play *Toy Symphony* in which the protagonist, asked to remember a happy experience, recalls being a third grade student learning about Cook's expeditions on the East Coast (2009: 4-5). Schlunke's exploration of feelings triggered by Cook's place and project of taking possession evoked my own childhood memories of Cook culture. In my mind these memories are also linked to the subsequent discovery of my family's claim to a white ancestral whaler who 'built the first house' in Western Victoria, the heritage listed "Mott's Cottage" in Port Fairy.

In 1934 'Captain Cook's cottage' was assembled in Melbourne's Fitzroy Gardens, having been purchased the previous year by Russell Grimwade, a scientist, businessman and philanthropist as a gift to celebrate the centenary of British settlement in Victoria. I remember visits to this cottage as a child quite vividly. Like taking on a mortgage and pretending not to savor the fries from the 'new' McDonalds restaurant on Smith St across the road, visiting Captain Cook's cottage seemed primarily to be for grown ups. Whether or not we grew up to own homes, I think that white kids dragged through this heritage building, bored and claustrophobic, re-emerged with a sense of the rewards (if not the details) of history. At the very least, as we followed our fathers, mothers, aunties and uncles as they stooped through doorways and dodged dark wooden ceiling beams, we learned to associate our inherited nation with the freedom to expand the self within spaces of suburban homes and virgin bush blocks. A sense of Indigenous absence in the Fitzroy gardens is produced both through its manicured ornamental gardens and the density of markers of British colonial and modern history. For example there is a

replica Tudor village outside the café donated by the citizens of Lambeth 'in appreciation of gifts of food dispatched from Victoria' after World War Two and a bust of Mary Gilbert, a servant on the first ship to the Port Phillip colony and 'mother of the first white child born in the colony' in the plant conservatory.

Significantly absent from my early childhood memories of Cook's cottage and my primary school lessons about the explorer's 'discovery of Australia' was the fact that, on the bicentennial of Cook's taking possession of Australia in 1770, Koorie people held a protest which concluded with an all-night vigil held under banners that denounced Cook as an invader: As Chris Healey writes, 'Less than forty years after it was landed in Victoria, the cottage was used by indigenous people for political and historical remembrance of a kind which Russell Grimwade could not have imagined...' (1997: np). It is interesting to consider these protests in light of Maryanne McCubbin's research on the Captain Cook's cottage project which found that there was very little impact on the explorer's public reputation when 'the question [was raised] of the young James Cook being forced out of his first position of grocer's assistant ... because of petty theft...' (1999: 37). This question of Cook's capacity for theft might have acquired more salience with the overturning of the legal doctrine of *terra nullius* in the High Court's 1992 Mabo decision had a treaty not been displaced by the more amorphous project of reconciliation. For if the people Cook encountered here were already members of different nations involved in relationships of communication, marriage and trade and, as such, possessors of sovereign rights to this country, there are only two possible conclusions to be drawn about the foundations of the nation. British sovereignty was either illegally acquired by Cook or else it arose through a magical process to which Captain Cook's [parents'] Cottage provides strange material testimony.

The protests can also be considered in relation to the fact that this 'heritage' building wasn't actually Captain Cook's home but was purchased and built by his parents in 1755 - the same year their son joined the Royal Navy. While the more accurate name of 'Captain Cook's Parents' Cottage' evokes unsettling connotations of inherited privilege, 'Captain Cook's Cottage' makes the explorer's home seem to literally follow him to a nation, which takes him as its founder. And it does so in spite of our knowledge that Cook never returned from Hawaii to take possession of the cottage that would be bequeathed to him by a grateful nation over a century later in a different part of the world.

Captain Cook's cottage exemplifies Bourdieu's concept of the *illusio* as a collective confidence trick on which basis social institutions are established and reproduced over time. Intergenerational attachments to the white magic of sovereignty (re)produced by Cook culture not only confer a privileged sense of being at home; they can render us oblivious to counter-articulations of sovereignty and belonging from Indigenous people who, as Moreton-Robinson reminds us invoking the lyrics of Peter Allen, 'still call Australia home' (Moreton-Robinson 2003) and in different ways convey their

understandings of a country that is unavailable either for white possession or gambling.

### **Conclusion**

The authority of laws rests only on the credit that is granted them. One believes in it; that is their only foundation. This act of faith is not an ontological or rational foundation. Still one has yet to think what believing means (Derrida 1992: 240).

I have carved a tree in the Fitzroy gardens for you and the fairies but mostly for the fairies and those who believe in them, for they will understand how necessary it is to have a fairy sanctuary – a place that is sacred and safe as a home should be to all living creatures. - Inscription on fairy tree enclosure by Ola Cohn, Melbourne, 23 May 1932



**Figure 5** Fairy Tree, Fitzroy Gardens, Melbourne. Photograph: Fiona Nicoll 2010

I have explored the intersection of Captain Cook and gambling in Australia as a way of linking whiteness as a form of symbolic capital to the establishment and maintenance of a 'house edge'. Cook's proclamation of British sovereignty off the North Coast of the continent on Possession Island in 1770 enabled subsequent generations of white migrants to collectively form a 'house' that would be formally constituted as a nation in 1901. For much of

the nation's history, racially discriminatory policies and practices ensured that the type and organization of social games would be stacked against punters racialized as Indigenous and non-white. To the extent that white people in Australia continue to benefit from this 'house edge' we are able to uniquely experience a sense of being 'at home' both as property owners and as gamblers.<sup>iv</sup> This is why the prospect of political and legal moves to adjust the house margin to accommodate the rights of Indigenous people such as briefly appeared in the wake of the High Court's Mabo and Wik decisions are so frequently (and sometimes violently) resisted.<sup>v</sup>

I want to end by recalling that my favorite part of childhood trips to Captain Cook's Cottage was not being dragged through dark rooms filled with the explorer's memorabilia but going to see the Fairy Tree outside which featured relief carvings of fairies on the base of an ancient red-gum tree executed by East Melbourne Sculptor and children's writer Ola Cohn in 1933, at the time of the cottage's importation from Yorkshire in England and re-construction. My grandmother told me these sculptured carvings were created by the fairies themselves to convince skeptics of their existence. This settled for me all the disturbing rumours about one's parents "really" being the tooth fairy. History and fantasy are woven together in these memories - reconstructed here as early lessons on the relationship between whiteness, possession and the comforting sense of being at home as "Australian". Reflecting on them helps me to recognize the legacy of Cook's willfulness in legal euphemisms such as the 'tide of history' on which basis, for example, the Federal Court determined that the rights to native title of the Yorta Yorta (who have never relinquished their sovereignty) were 'washed away.'

Cohn's fairy tree underscores how the possessive title of 'Captain Cook's cottage' functions as a kind of 'mythical speech' (Barthes 1973), working to naturalize the nation as a racialized social order from contingent histories of colonial exploration and subsequent waves of migration. Bourdieu suggests that the hopes modern subjects place in the value of 'society' may be no more solidly based than those previous generations placed their faith in God. We know that Cook never lived in 'his' cottage; we know that Cook was not physically on the East Coast when he claimed possession of Australia on behalf of the crown. And we know that Captain Cook's cottage is no more evidence of British sovereignty than the fairies carved onto the ancient red-gum stump are evidence of their existence. In spite of this, the pervasiveness of Cook culture in everyday practices and products of gambling demonstrates the extent to which *habitus* in Australia is shaped by an originary myth of white possession embodied by the British explorer.

In this article I have traced a thread of constitutive irrationality through intersections of Cook and gambling; from the punters parodied in *Babakueria*, though Captain Cook's Tavern and the cottage in which Captain Cook didn't live. But to join Schlunke in emphasizing the irrationality of Cook culture is not to deny the operation of a 'practical reason' that makes sense of

otherwise disparate practices, products, spaces and dispositions. In his discussion of 'the "mythology of the house"' Bourdieu observes:

What is being tacitly asserted through the creation of a house is the will to create a permanent group, united by stable social relations, a lineage capable of perpetuating itself over time in a manner similar to the durable, stable, unchangeable residence. It is a collective project for, or wager on, the future of the domestic unit, that is, on its cohesion, its integration or, if one prefers, on its capacity to resist break-up and dispersal. (2005:20)

If the investigation I have undertaken into the intersection of Captain Cook culture and gambling has presented the explorer's possessive claim without Indigenous peoples' consent as a calculated gamble, the question still remains as to 'what is most urgently at stake in the present'? I think the most urgent ethical challenge facing every non-Indigenous citizen whose possession and sense of belonging is secured through Cook culture, is to place our bets *against* the house established to protect the symbolic capital of whiteness. This requires us to address the following question: 'what are my investments in the continuing non-recognition of Indigenous sovereignty in Australia?' Whether we are Anglo or non-Anglo migrants this question opens a space for imagining how our relationships with Indigenous Australians would change if we refused together to pay our debts to white ancestors as though they had 'cleared the land ...ESPECIALLY FOR [US]!'

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Australian theorists such as George Vassiliopoulos and Tola Nicolopoulos, Ghassan Hage, Jon Stratton and Suvendrini Perera have disaggregated the category 'non-Indigenous' to consider the different ways that non-Anglo-Celtic and non-white migrants are positioned both in relation to Indigenous Australians and in relation to the dominant Anglo-Celtic norm. See Jon Stratton, 'Before Holocaust Memory: Making Sense of Trauma Between Post Memory and Cultural Memory', *Journal of Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association*, 1.1 54-70; Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, Pluto, Sydney, 1998; Nicolopoulos Tola and Vassiliopoulos George, 'Racism, foreigner communities and the onto-pathology of white Australian subjectivity', in *Whitening Race*, (ed) Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004; Perera, Suvendrini, 'Who will I become? The Multiple Formations of Australian Whiteness,' *Journal of Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association*, 1.1: 30-39.

<sup>ii</sup> In a seminal essay published in 1993 critical legal scholar Cheryl Harris forges a link between white race privilege and possession, demonstrating how whiteness in America was simultaneously constructed as a privileged right to property (which included the labor of slaves and the lands of Indigenous people) and as a property of persons able to pass as white. See 'Whiteness as Property', *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 106, No. 8, 1993. For a valuable account of how white possession operates between national boundaries see Osuri, Goldie and Bannerjee, Bobby, 'White Diasporas: Media Representations of September 11 and the Unbearable Whiteness of Being in Australia', *Social Semiotics*, vol.14, no.2, 2005

<sup>iii</sup> Lest Aboriginality appear to be relatively 'fixed' in relation to white diasporic subjectivity it is important to register contexts within which this dialogue about Cook's historical meaning is salient for Indigenous people today. The first relates to ongoing connections of descendents of dispossessed Indigenous people to countries settled by possessive white interests. The second is the use of international forums to produce conversations and promote the interests of Indigenous people who remain within the boundaries of nation states established in Cook's wake. And the third involves the

experiences and rights of members of Indigenous diasporic communities who have out-migrated to different parts of the world. See for example, J Kehaulani Kauanui, 'Diasporic Deracination and "Off-Island" Hawaiians', *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol.19, no.1, 2007

<sup>iv</sup> I have argued this point more extensively elsewhere. See 'A Comparative Discussion of the Racialized Play of Symbolic Capital in Cultural and Political Economies of Indigenous Gambling in Australia and the United States', *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, vol.2, no.2, 2009 pp.10-24

<sup>v</sup> White resistance to Indigenous rights is also reflected in pathologizing representations of Indigenous Australians exclusively as 'vulnerable consumers' of gambling products. As we saw in the previous section, in contrast to the US and Canada, hereditary prerogatives of white possession have prevented the recognition of economic rights embodied in Indigenous ownership of gambling from appearing on the table of political negotiations in Australia.