

## The Apologetic Brand: building Australia's brand on a post-colonial apology

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### Introduction

Baz Luhrmann's film *Australia* (2008) is the most expensive and one of the highest grossing films in Australian history (Connell 2008). While cinema has long been recognised for its role in constructing and mediating national identities, *Australia* was also an exercise in branding and promoting the nation. The film is an example of how commercial films form part of the nation-branding industry. The film was partly financed and subsidised by Australian governments and it was accompanied by a \$50 million print and advertising campaign funded by Tourism Australia that reached an estimated audience of 580 million viewers worldwide (Hogan 2010). *Australia* uses the visual and narrative form of a Hollywood epic to construct a mythological history for the Australian identity organised around the motif of apology. *Australia* addresses questions of native title, colonial and frontier relations, the stolen generations and reconciliation. In doing so, the film references key events in settler-indigenous relations since the 1990s: the High Court's 1992 Mabo decision which recognised Native Title; the 1997 Bringing Them Home report on the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, and which first called for a national apology; and the Federal Parliament's 2008 Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples.

While *Australia* follows an established tradition of post-apology cinema in Australia, what is of interest in this chapter is how Luhrmann and the Australian government turned a post-colonial apology narrative into a message that promoted Australia as a tourism destination. The campaign featured *Come Walkabout* television advertisements produced and directed by Luhrmann using characters and themes from the film. Luhrmann produced two versions of the advertisements, one set in New York and one in Shanghai for US and Chinese tourism markets respectively. Each advertisement follows the same storyline: a middle-class professional in crisis is 'sung' to Australia by a young indigenous boy where they undergo a

personal transformation in the outback. The film and advertising campaign each visualise Australia's empty interior landscapes, presenting them as places of adventure, self-discovery, personal transformation and redemption. By considering the film and advertisements in relation to each other we examine how apology is deployed in Australia's efforts to brand and position itself in the global tourism marketplace.

Nation-brands have been critiqued for their inability to 'account for the plurality of voices, legacies and competing visions of the nation-state' (Aronczyk 2008). Yet, in these advertisements one of the most vexed aspects of Australia's identity was deployed as part of a text constructed to promote the national tourism industry. Following the logic of contemporary branding, nation-brands work as 'participatory' and 'collaborative' processes (Volcic and Andrejevic 2011). Often this participation is carefully constructed and organised within the parameters set by an advertising campaign. For instance, citizens are asked to distribute branded materials, or instructed to present the nation in a particular way, or contribute images of their cultural life to a website. Brands can also rely on participation in the sense that they are the platforms and processes through which we make sense of our identity, culture and politics.

In the nation-branding examined in this chapter, a post-colonial narrative of apology is deployed to promote individual and personal transformation. A trip to post-colonial Australia is presented as a meaningful act of ethical consumption. Tourists are given the opportunity to act out the narrative of reconciliation dramatized in the film *Australia* in order to – like the main characters in the film – become rejuvenated, happier and more ethical individuals. *Come Walkabout* illustrates how nation-branding exploits key identity formation processes in the nation-state to create a national tourism market positioning. In this case, apology acquires a commercial utility. The chapter begins by tracing how colonial and post-colonial identities were constructed in Australia since colonisation. This serves as a necessary background to illustrating how Australia's post-colonial narrative of apology becomes central not just to identity formation *within* the nation-state but also how the nation-state *projects* itself to middle-class Americans and westerners. We then examine *Australia* in relation to the broader project of post-apology cinema and consider how *Come Walkabout* adopts the motifs of post-apology cinema to construct a post-apology nation-brand. The chapter aims to contribute to debates about the 'democratic' function of nation-

brands. In distinction to accounts that nation-brands are undemocratic because they offer only reductive representations of national identities, we contend that in the case of Australia nation-brands should be critiqued not because they fail to represent the nation-state but because of the way they appropriate significant identity processes for commercial ends.

### **Australian colonialism and post-colonialism**

To understand Australia's post-colonial branding we first need to examine Australia's colonial roots. European imperialism was drawn into the Indian Ocean region by a desire to build direct European-Asian trade routes that would enable Europeans to bypass Ottoman Empire trade routes controlled by Muslim middle men. Portuguese, Dutch and English traders sailed into the Indian Ocean seeking opportunities for trade. The Portuguese were the first to set up an enormous Indian Ocean trading empire, but one which never reached Australian shores. Next came the Dutch East India Company ships, and it was they who became the first Europeans to explore Australia, which they called New Holland. The Dutch East India Company (VOC), the world's first multinational corporation, dispatched numerous expeditions to identify worthy trading partners. In the process they built trading stations wherever they identified business opportunities - in India, the Persian Gulf, Indonesia, China, Taiwan and Japan. They also sent exploratory missions to Australia and New Zealand. Their response to Australia is important because it reveals how Europeans in the early colonial period viewed Australia. The De Vlamingh expedition of 1697 was especially significant because the expedition recommended to the VOC that the land had little to offer economically. It appeared to be only dry dunes unsuitable for cattle and people. More importantly, the expedition noted that the natives avoided contact and had not developed an economy to trade with, which contrasted with the developed economies the Dutch found in Asia. De Vlamingh's expedition made it clear that there was no profit to be made in Australia because there was no economy to attract traders.

The English, however, took a different view to the Dutch. If Australia did not have an existing economy to conquer or trade with, the English saw an opportunity to build one. This was a distinctive characteristic of the British Empire. Wherever they found territory where there was no form economic development they recognised, they moved in people from elsewhere in the empire. For example, they moved Chinese to Malaysia and Singapore;

Africans to the Caribbean and North America; Indians to Malaysia, Fiji, the Caribbean, South Africa, East Africa and Mauritius, Melanesians to Australia; Britons to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Rhodesia.

In Australia's case, the need to import a labour force coincided with the need to export a criminal class (after the loss of the America ended the shipment of British criminals there). A penal colony in Australia created both a means to build an Australian economy to trade with and a place to deport troublesome Britons. The British Empire created an Australian labour force by deporting 165,000 convicts to the colony. European colonisation in Australia was unique because it had its roots in a form of white slavery. The earliest capital accumulation in the new Australian colonies was drawn from convict rather than 'native' labour. Colonisation in Australia also helped the English exert control over another part of their empire – Ireland. The colony provided a place to send 40,000 Irish convicts, many for political activities in 1798, 1803 and 1848.

Australia also attracted free settlers from across the British Isles. These settlers intermarried and gradually lost their Englishness, Welshness, Scottishness and Irishness. They came to see themselves as 'British'. By the twentieth century, Australians were proud to be seen as 'Britons' from the southern hemisphere. In fact, Australians were so 'British' that when offered independence by the Statute of Westminster in 1931 they refused it (unlike the Canadians and South Africans). Australia only accepted its independence in 1942 by the Statute of Westminster Adoption Act. This was prompted by the Fall of Singapore, which shattered British power in the Asia-Pacific. Australia turned to the Americans to defend them from Japanese invasion. Regardless, through the 1950s and 1960s many Australians still routinely referred to themselves as 'British' and many still called the United Kingdom 'home' even if they had never been there. Under Prime Minister Menzies (1939-1941 and 1949-1966) the British-ness of Australia was foregrounded. Given the strength of this colonial identity right through the post-war period, when and why did Australians begin to move toward a post-colonial identity?

The roots of the post-colonial discourses we see in *Australia* and *Come Walkabout* find their origins in the United States. During the first half of the twentieth century the United States was a frustrated global power because it found its ambitions blocked by European

imperialism. In particular, the British Empire straddled the globe. It was the Second World War that gave the United States the opportunity to break up this empire. During this war the American State Department began formulating strategies to unravel European colonialism and replace it with a Pax Americana (Louw 2010). Two significant features of the American plan were the demonization of European colonialism and a focus on undermining support for colonialism amongst key sectors of Britain's elite, including intellectuals and journalists across the British Empire. The Americans worked toward getting the British to deconstruct their own empire (Louw 2010). This was a cultural and political project. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s Americans successfully diffused decolonisation discourses with intellectuals (mostly journalists and academics) throughout the empire. They encouraged resistance to European imperialism and created an active support base for decolonisation in British Empire universities and newsrooms.

While American culture and ideals began to flow into Australia, for many Australians decolonisation remained a phenomenon happening elsewhere in the empire throughout the 1950s. It was in the 1970s, after the post-war Menzies government (1949-1966), that decolonisation became a mainstream political and cultural project within Australia. The Whitlam government (1972-1975) abolished the white Australia policy, replaced God Save the Queen as the national anthem, and established the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Land Rights. Decolonisation unfolded slowly and haphazardly in the post-war period. While America became increasingly important to Australia's political, economic and cultural life – the British colonial history and sense of place within the empire lived on. Throughout the post-war period various 'culture wars' unfolded as the rewriting and reimagining of Australian history has taken place. Australian identity is characterised by ongoing attempts to legitimise versions of British colonial identity, American post-colonial or distinctively indigenous identities within the context of Australian settlement.

The post-colonial narrative of apology that informs both *Australia* and *Come Walkabout* illustrates how Australia has constructed and positioned its identity in relation to American culture and power. *Australia* and *Come Walkabout* set out to present Australia as a post-colonial nation apologetic for its colonial past. In both the film and the advertisements the outback landscapes play the role of affirming post-colonial identities as universal and ethical. This suggests that the Australian identity might have turned away from the

colonising power of the British but toward the neo-colonial imaginary of America. While *Australia* was panned by Australian audiences for its historical inaccuracies, ridiculous portrayal of settlers, and patronising depiction of indigenous characters; it does capture a dominant institutionalised development of Australian identity. The process of apology has become the dominant prism for 'reconciling' Australia's past. Apology has become a notable post-colonial political gesture (Cunningham 2002, Gibney et al. 2008). While there has been extensive debate about the politics of apology, there has been little consideration so far of the broader use of apology as a device in commercial and state-subsidised popular culture and nation-branding. By examining apology in this way we can give critical attention to how apology 'orders' and 'reorders' social relationships (Gibney et al. 2008, Thompson 2008).

In his examination of the politics of apology Cunningham (2002) outlines several arguments against and in favour of apologies. The objections to apology, he suggests, are:

- Apology is absurd if you can't be held responsible for events.
- Apology is only a political gesture. It has no consequence and may even be immoral.
- Apology takes the form of *reduction ad absurdum*. If we begin apologising for historical events, we would never stop because the human history is full of winners and losers.
- Apology is associated with an attack on the integrity of the national identity and history. Apologies are the product of a 'guilt industry' working in favour of minority groups.

In response, Cunningham (2002) makes two arguments in favour of apology:

- Apologies are symbolically important. They recognise and acknowledge past suffering that lives on in the present. We might not be 'responsible' but we acknowledge how our collective identities and contemporary social relations are a product of the struggles of the past.
- Apologies have utility. Recognition and acknowledgement enables 'better' social relations.

In Australia, all of these arguments have been mobilised for and against apology since *Bringing Them Home* put the idea of an apology clearly within the mainstream political debate in 1997. While progressive forces argued for the symbolic and practical importance

of the apology, it has also been met with resistance and cynicism. If post-apology cinema demonstrates how apology is symbolically important in making sense of the past, post-apology branding demonstrates how apologies have utility – in the case examined here a utility aimed at building a commercial tourism market.

### **Post-apology cinema**

Since the 1990s, the politics of guilt and apology have made themselves felt within Australian cinema through accounts of the nation's history and identity that respond to Mabo, Bringing them Home and the Apology in addressing directly questions of native title, stolen generations and reconciliation (Collins 2010). Where indigenous people were invisible or passive within the construction of Australian national identity associated with the British Empire period, post-1990 cinema has seen an active engagement with indigenous stories and characters. Post-apology cinema is aligned with the cultural and political project of deconstructing and apologising for Australia's colonial heritage and founding myths.

As well as *Australia* (2008), some of the other films that could be included in this post-Mabo to post-Apology trajectory include big budget films such as Philip Noyce's *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002) and independent and government financed films by Australian and indigenous directors such as Paul Goldman's *Australian Rules* (2002), Rolf De Heer's *The Tracker* (2002) Ivan Sen's *Beneath Clouds* (2002), Warwick Thornton's *Samson and Delilah* (2009), Brendan Fletchers' *Mad Bastards* (2011) and the television series' *First Australians* (2009) and *Mabo* (2012). Rolf De Heer's *Ten Canoes* (2006) is significant as well as the first feature entirely in an Australian indigenous language. Adding another distinctive element to post-apology Australian films are the recent ensemble comedies *Brand New Dae* (2009, Rachel Perkins) and *The Sapphires* (2012, Wayne Blair). These two films are musicals featuring a cast of indigenous popular musicians.

Many of these post-apology films have acquired critical acclaim and found large audiences in Australia. Critics and scholars have argued that the development of this post-apology cinema helps to reimagine the national identity (Collins 2010, Haag 2010). Post-apology films draw attention to the 'unfinished business' of black-white relations by illustrating indigenous agency. Although *Australia* received mixed reviews from critics, many located

the film within the narratives of post-apology cinema. For Morton (2010), *Australia* recognises that the 'founding drama of white colonisation was not legitimate' and that this has characterised the nation since 1788. Morton (2010) argues that where *Australia* makes a productive contribution is in suggesting a 'solution to the problem', that if 'blackfella law was originally unrecognised, then it must be recognised retrospectively'. *Australia* creates a new foundation myth for the nation from which the separate-ness of indigenous history, identity, law and culture can be recognised. In developing a portrayal of indigenous agency, post-apology films also demonstrate the 'more-than-human' agency of the land (Simpson 2010). *Australia* uses the northern outback landscape as a 'romantic space in which interracial healing might be played out through intercultural cooperation and understanding'. The outback is a mythical space, a separate space, within which we might address our 'shameful past' and imagine our 'idealised future' (Carleton 2008). The outback functions as a space of imagination, where the Australian identity can be 'worked on'.

*Australia* emplaces the sensibilities of the present day into the historical period of events. In doing so, it uses historical events to affirm contemporary features of both Australian and global post-colonial identities. The film imagines our relationship to the present (Turner 1993) by creating characters that travel back in time to work on our history. The film asks us to see the present Australian identity as something that always-already existed, struggling against those in our history who sought to make it something else. Within the plot of a Hollywood blockbuster the 'good' post-colonial heroes fight against the colonial 'bad' guys to save Australia. The gesture of apology presents indigenous people as legitimate custodians of the land and settlers as foolish, contemptible and unnatural intruders. The plot of the film involves the British Aristocrat Lady Sarah, the wild outback settler the Drover, and the young indigenous boy Nullah banding together to drive a mob of cattle from a remote cattle station to Darwin. They need to get the cattle to market to save the station from falling into the hands of the rapacious pastoralist King Carney. The Drover reforms Lady Sarah's colonial attitudes. As she recognises indigenous sovereignty the young Nullah and King George help them in their quest against the colonisers. This is dramatized in a typical blockbuster fantasy in the final act. As the Japanese army invades Darwin (an event that never happened) the colonial British crumble while the post-colonial American heroes arrive to save the day and free the indigenous children who had been stolen by the British colonials.



The agency of indigenous people and the stage of the outback landscape both figure prominently in post-apology cinema. Collins (2010) argues that post-apology films provide a way for intellectuals to reframe media images and narrate a different history. In her account, cinema provides a way to counter the flow of negative images of indigenous Australians in the nation's media and culture. Collins (2010) argues that *Australia's* ending, where the indigenous elder King George takes the young indigenous boy Nullah back to 'our country' is a gesture of 'anti-colonial' subjectivity. King George rejects assimilation for the young boy and maintains his own culture and language. Konishi (2011) sees this gesture as a critique of the Federal intervention, the government policy since 2007 to compulsorily manage indigenous people's incomes, local services and communities. For Konishi (2011), *Australia* reinstates the aboriginal father – in the character of King George – that the intervention neuters. Collins (2010) sees King George as an indigenous character that makes a gesture of 'anti-colonial friendship'. That is, at the same time he walks away from settler Australia and the roles it marked out for him and his grandson, King George tells Lady Sarah it is 'my country, our country' and the young boy promises her that he will 'sing' her to him. The gesture of indigenous characters demarcating their separate-ness of culture and language along with their willingness to enter into friendship requires an 'ethical response from settler Australia' (Collins 2010: 72). Cinema allows for these affective and ethical responses to be worked out.

Collins' (2010) formula of an indigenous character offering a gesture of anti-colonial friendship that demands an ethical response from settler Australia is intrinsic to the film and advertisements. In *Australia*, the Drover and Lady Sarah are the unlikely characters who mobilise their contemporary sensibilities, on the stage of the outback, to resist historical events as they were unfolding. The ethical response of settler Australia, the recognition of blackfella law and the power of the land are the key political narratives of the film. The film constructs this ethical response by having characters from the post-apology present 'travel' back to the colonial Australia to 'make amends'. This central gesture of the film becomes the central motif of the advertisements. Apology is not just a political narrative but also a promotional one.

### **Post-apology nation branding**

Luhrman's *Come Walkabout* advertisements use key motifs from post-apology cinema. In the advertisements the gestures of anti-colonial friendship, invitation to country, and ethical response of settlers act as promotional devices. Stadler and Mitchell (2010) argue that *Australia* 'enacts a complex and ambivalent fantasy of reconciliation and nationalism played out on the *paysage moralise* of "The Never-Never". The Never-Never is a fictional outback space featured in Australian poetry, literature, film, and also advertising. For Stadler and Mitchell (2010) the outback 'exerts a kind of 'indigenising' power to change both the characters' and viewers' connection to the land and the nation in turn'. The empty interior is a space within which we might confront antagonisms in the Australian identity – racism, colonialism, exploitation, isolation – and overcome them through 'transformative' experiences. Like the film, in *Come Walkabout* the landscape functions as an affective space, it transforms people's relationships, how they feel and who they think they are. The 'post-Mabo fantasy of reconciliation' (Stadler and Mitchell 2010), in the form of King George's gesture of 'anti-colonial friendship' and invitation to country is the central promotional claim of the *Come Walkabout* advertisements.

In both the film and the advertisements the indigenous characters give the white colonial settler or middle class tourists access to the redemptive power of 'country'. This access cannot be granted without the settler or tourist first acknowledging the 'separate-ness' of blackfella law. King George can only 'sing' Lady Sarah when she is willing to listen, the professional can only wake up in Australia when they see Nullah face to face. Recognising the indigenous person in this way is an 'ethical response' of the settler or professional to the gesture of 'anti-colonial friendship'. The advertisement frames the acceptance of the gesture by going on holiday as an 'ethical response'. The film and advertisement share key motifs: the settler or professional in crisis, the indigenous person offers a gesture of friendship, the settler or professional acknowledges the gesture, the redemptive power of 'country' is opened to them.

The film and advertisements begin with a colonial settler or middle-class professional who is lost, defeated and in crisis. In the film Lady Sarah arrives in Australia to find Faraway Downs in chaos, her husband dead, and conniving pastoralists attempting to swindle her out of her land and cattle. The film opens with a series of scenes that frame the key characters: the connection to country of Nullah and King George, the heroic Drover fighting

the racist and conniving pastoralists, and the idiocy of the British colonial elite. Turner (1993) identifies this as a familiar characterisation in Australian cinema, in *Breaker Morant* and *Gallipoli* the British are portrayed as ridiculous. Lady Sarah is initially appalled by the land. She attempts to order the pastoralists and drovers around to no avail. She finds herself bewildered in the outback. This crisis is mirrored in the advertisements. *Come Walkabout* begins with a night-time view of the New York cityscape, a woman is on the phone to her partner. He says, 'look I just think we need a break, I gotta go'. The woman is distressed, we see her run across a crowded New York street in the rain, giving instructions to a colleague on her phone: 'oh no I said not on the front page', 'there's no photo on the front page', 'it'll have to be done again', 'yes, all of it', 'it doesn't matter how late'. The images of the woman rushing through the city are interspersed with images of a young indigenous boy's legs – Nullah – as he walks along the rainy streets of New York. His bare feet leave muddy red dirt footprints on the footpath. They dissolve in the rain.

The woman gets another phone call from her partner while she is working in her apartment on her laptop.

Man: how was your day?

Woman: huh, it hasn't ended yet.

Man: It's never going to change is it?

Woman: Can we please not have this argument now?

Man: It's always work.

Nullah is depicted, standing in the rain as busy commuters rush by, looking up at the woman's apartment.

Woman: What are you saying?

Man: You're not the same person I fell in love with.

In the film Nullah says, 'when Missus Boss first come to this land, she look but she not see'. Similarly, in the advertisements the professional is depicted unable to 'see' the real value of their life and relationships. In both the New York and Shanghai versions of the

advertisements, after being told by their partners that the relationship is breaking down the response of the busy professionals is to keep working.

In the film and advertisements these crises lead to gestures of anti-colonial friendship from an indigenous character. The gesture constructs a binary between the ignorant and now repenting colonial subjects and the wise and forgiving indigenous person. The indigenous characters are magnanimous enough to forgive and befriend the colonial settler or middle-class professional. In the film, the motif is played out twice. First, Nullah 'sings' the cattle herd and prevents them going over the edge of a deep gorge. Second, the next morning when they are without water because the pastoralists have poisoned the waterholes in the desert, King George arrives and offers to 'sing' them across the Never-Never. In the advertisements, at the point where the busy professionals' relationships have broken down and they return to work, Nullah arrives in the night. His presence silences the televisions and the laptops and he 'sings' them to Australia.

The gesture of anti-colonial friendship from the indigenous characters Nullah and King George requires an ethical response from the settlers and tourists. In the film, after Nullah has stopped the cattle herd, Lady Sarah runs for him, embraces him, and they look face to face. This moment is repeated in the advertisements where Nullah 'wakes' the businesswoman. In each case the settler and tourist 'recognise' the indigenous character. In *Come Walkabout* we see the woman weeping and hear the indigenous boy's voiceover whisper, 'sometimes we have to get lost to find ourselves'. His dripping feet are depicted walking through the woman's apartment, leaving red dirt footprints. As he walks past the TV showing cable news and the laptop they switch off. While the woman is in bed he leans over her and whispers 'sometimes we gotta go walkabout'. The woman wakes, and takes the boy's hands. They look at each other, face to face. The boy sprinkles a handful of red glimmering dust through the hand of the woman. The dust falls into a pool of water. As the dust falls into the water, we see the woman dive into the water.

In the film, this gesture of 'ethical response' is played out over several scenes. After Nullah stops the herd, Lady Sarah also 'recognises' the Drover. They drink rum, and under a boab tree Lady Sarah invites the Drover to dance. This is a significant moment in the film, up until this point the Drover has been the sole post-colonial character. From this moment, Lady Sarah begins her transformation towards the post-colonial attitudes of The Drover and

contemporary Australian society. This transformation scene is repeated in the Shanghai version of *Come Walkabout* where the Chinese businessman Lee Ming dances with his partner under the same boab tree.

The next day, when King George appears and offers to 'sing' them across the Never-Never the Drover helps to frame the ethical response by telling Lady Sarah, 'he's a wizard, he can find his way anywhere. The ancestors created songs for everything, for every rock and every tree, they're all linked. The magic man sings them in order, he'll sing us to water, even across the Never-Never'. The imagery of the following montage of the film is synonymous with the broader genre of Australian tourism advertising with aboriginal elders dancing ritual dances and outback vistas.

Having made the 'ethical response' to King George and Nullah's gesture of 'anti-colonial friendship' in both the film and the advertisement, the redemptive power of 'country' unfolds. For Lady Sarah in the film they successfully drive the cattle to Darwin and thwart the conniving pastoralists' attempts to swindle them. For the professionals in the advertisements they wake up in the Australian outback, their relationship with their partner transformed into one of affection and intimacy. The trip from Faraway Downs to Darwin contains the key scenes appropriated for the advertisements. The film and advertisements are arguably inter-textual. They work together, mutually reinforcing their narratives and promotional strategies. The brand, narratives and politics of the nation interplay in the texts.

In the film, following their successful trip to Darwin, Lady Sarah and the Drover consummate their relationship. We are treated to a series of wet season outback tourism vistas. In one of these shots the audience are taken over the edge of a waterfall and into a swimming hole where Lady Sarah and The Drover are embracing, the shot then pans out of the waterhole to the landscape. This exact scene is appropriated for the New York *Come Walkabout* advertisement, where the sand falls through the professional's hand and she wakes in the waterhole embracing her partner. The man says, 'I'm glad you're back'. The shot zooms out of the waterhole to an outback gorge and vast outback vista. Text on the screen reads: 'She arrived as Ms K Mathieson, Executive VP of Sales. We come back to the woman's face, relaxed, in the swimming hole. The text on screen beside her face reads: 'She

departed as Kate'. The final tagline is: 'Australia: Come walkabout'. The Shanghai version of the advertisement follows the same storyline, except with a Chinese male protagonist. He returns to work at his office late at night. As the boy enters the computers and screens go blank. As the boy pours the dust through his hands he closes his eyes and wakes with his partner having dinner in a tree in the outback. 'He arrived as Mr Lee, Finance Manager. He departed as Lee Ming.'

The key romantic moments in the film between Lady Sarah and The Drover are appropriated for the advertisements. The gesture of friendship from the indigenous person and the ethical response from the settler or tourist is the key device in both the film and advertisements. In the advertisements the response is ritualised by Nullah pouring red dirt through their hands. This moment inverts a powerful political image in Australia's settler-indigenous history. After the Wave Hill Strike in 1975 Prime Minister Gough Whitlam poured a handful of sand through the hands of Vincent Lingiari, a Gurindji elder, as part of returning land to Gurindji in the Northern Territory. In the advertisements Nullah gives 'country' to the professional. In both the film and the advertisements the white Westerner who is 'forgiven' and 'transformed' retains their wealth, status and power. In the case of Lady Sarah, she retains her wealth and land while dismissing the immoral Australian settlers. For the tourists the outback is a place of transformation they consume before returning to New York or Shanghai.

In the *Come Walkabout* advertisements tourism is not only about pleasure and consumption, it also has a deeper meaning. Connected to the Stolen Generations narrative of the film, it is imbued with a political and ethical content. Following Stadler and Mitchell (2010), the advertisement and film highlight the 'affective' experience of travelling and its 'ethics'. Tourism is reimagined as an apology. The film invites audiences and travellers to identify, or misrecognise, their journey as acknowledging indigenous connection to country and apologising for colonial exploitation. Westerners implicitly uncomfortable with tourism in a colonial sense – consuming exotic cultures, exploiting the under-developed world, using culture as a resource for individual pleasure and enjoyment – feel more comfortable with tourism in the post-colonial sense as a transformative journey. The nation and tourism constructed follows the ethics of cultural capitalism: fair trade, sustainability and concern for the environment, and respect for different cultures. In the advertisement Nullah

promotes the fantasy of taking the tourist to 'country' for transformation. He offers the tourist relief or respite from the emptiness of middle class life. This relief has a political content in addition to the usual affective transformations promised by contemporary tourism promotion: reflection, relaxation, intoxication, places of natural wonder. Going to the 'Never-Never' with Nullah is a meaningful political gesture, as well as being beautiful, enjoyable and relaxing. Where Paul Hogan or Lara Bingle's invitations to the foreign traveller were ones of natural beauty, indulgence and relaxation, *Come Walkabout* is all of that plus an invitation to become a better person by recognising indigenous sovereignty and country.

One way to view *Come Walkabout* is as a text that commodifies and exploits not only indigenous identity and connection to country (Hogan 2010, Simpson 2010), but also the process of post-colonial apology. The film and advertisements grant indigenous characters agency that has value for the branding of the nation-state. Hogan (2010) notes that Tourism Australia explicitly stated the campaign's objective was to achieve a '3.2 per cent increase in international arrivals, and to prevent a predicted decline in domestic tourism' (37). On that basis Hogan (2010) argued that the campaign 'appropriates and commodifies Aboriginal culture in ways that are unlikely to benefit the Aboriginal community. Such cultural appropriation may be seen as an extension of the colonial appropriation of indigenous land and resources.' The advertisements, in Hogan's (2010) view, benefit the white middle-class Australians who dominate the nation's cultural, political, economic and commercial institutions. The commercial nation-state not only appropriates the identities of indigenous people for commercial and political gain but also turns its own apology to indigenous people into a commercially valuable claim. The indigenous invitation to country gives legitimacy to post-colonial forms of development, politics, identity, and culture.

### **Brand landscapes: platforms for ethical consumption**

In *National Fictions* Graeme Turner (1993: 29) argues that in Australian film and literature 'the land takes on a narrative function beyond that of mere setting... the land operates as a source of meaning, offering a kind of spirituality or significance that is explicitly absent from society'. The land becomes particularly significant in Australian narrative as a device for imagining resolutions to 'conflicts which are insoluble within culture' (1993: 36). Cinema – together with a nation's wider field of cultural production – works inter-textually with

advertising and branding. Brands promote and build the cultural mythologies they rely on (Holt 2006). If *Australia* 'establishes' this myth it is then 'available for appropriation' in the *Come Walkabout* advertisements (Turner 1993: 62). In the *Come Walkabout* advertisements the land empowers those who identify with indigenous people's connection to country as part of seeking their own personal redemption and transformation. In *Come Walkabout* the landscape is presented as a stage of ethical consumption. The advertisements are both part of the process of making sense of, and capitalising on, national processes of apology and reconciliation. In *Come Walkabout* the cultural and political project of post-apology cinema gets mobilised within a nation's strategic efforts to promote itself to middle-class tourists.

Nation-brands are not only produced by advertising agencies and nation-branding consultancies, they are also mediated by cultural producers and citizens. The nation-brand is a social process that requires the symbolic consent and collaboration of the public. *Australia* and *Come Walkabout* demonstrate how nation-brands' don't necessarily 'erase' or 'ignore' the complexities of the nation state. They can in fact cannily appropriate and commodify the nation's ongoing process of identity formation. In doing so, they articulate the prevailing political project of the nation with promotional objectives. They produce promotional narratives that the nation's citizens can identify as part of a larger national identity. Inasmuch as those citizens identify with the dominant national identity they can also identify with the nation's brand. For travellers, a holiday in Australia becomes an act of ethical consumption. While for Australians, advancing Australian industry and tourism contributes to the development of a liberal, multicultural and egalitarian society. Rather than involving 'erasing' particular attributes, the fundamental work of nation-brands might simply be to articulate whatever the dominant identity project of a nation at a particular point in time is with the commercial and political objectives of the nation state. In the case of *Come Walkabout* the post-colonial politics of apology can be rendered synonymous with the commercial objectives of a tourism industry seeking to attract middle-class American and western travellers.

There are numerous examples of nation-brands attempting to present a stylised or sanitised view of the nation (Aronczyk 2008). A nation's brand links it with the 'shared values of a global order' and in doing so necessarily frames the parameters within which the nation imagines and projects itself (Aronczyk 2008). While a nation-brand works to



distinguish itself from competitors, it does that by first agreeing to the criteria of a 'good' nation state. Most often, a 'good' nation-state is one that complies with American discourses of democratisation, free trade and post-colonialism. Nation-branding is often most apparent in post-socialist and post-authoritarian states orienting themselves toward America as part of a broader process of democratisation and marketization. In these contexts, the work of nation-branding is most often undertaken by consultants from outside the nation-state (Aronczyk 2008, Volcic and Andrejevic 2011). In emerging states the political, economic and cultural infrastructure is often built by American or western funded institutions. Internationalised nation-branding consultancies tend to offer emerging nations a 'template' for branding and positioning their offerings in the global marketplace (Aronczyk 2008).

In more developed countries like Australia, nation-branding has a longer history and is more embedded in the nation's wider process of cultural production. While countries like Australia have had their fair share of pithy slogans and timeless-spaceless touristic imagery; this isn't an inherent and immovable characteristic of nation-branding. Australia's nation-branding fits within the American post-colonial project. *Australia* dramatizes the nation's post-war turn away from the British and their 'bad' colonialism and toward American post-colonialism. Rather than being imposed by international consultants however, Australia's nation-branding is distinctively embedded within established forms of storytelling and cultural production. The nation-brand is interrelated with the broader project of post-apology cinema, which itself emerges from a wide range of cultural, political and economic shifts taking place in Australia since the 1970s: investment in Australian film, investment in indigenous cultural production, and interest in indigenous narratives from Australian audiences, to suggest a few.

During the twentieth century brands became intrinsic to the symbolisation of a shared way of life within a nation state. Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012: 8) argues that if they are now a 'primary cultural form' then 'explaining brand culture as a sophisticated form of corporate appropriation... keeps intact the idea that corporate culture exists outside – indeed, in opposition to – 'authentic' culture.' Following Banet-Weiser, nation-brands cannot only be understood in terms of 'appropriating' authentic culture on the one hand or 'imposing' sanitised, globalised, westernised culture on the other. Nation-brands are at their most

sophisticated when they draw on a wider field of cultural production to channel lived identity practices into market structures.

*Come Walkabout* invites tourists to 'work on themselves' by translating a collective process of apology into an individual moment of consumption. When channelled through the logic of branding, apology serves as a device for individuals to express their own values. This echoes the distinction Chouliaraki (2013: 44) makes in her examination of post-humanitarian representations of suffering and otherness. Chouliaraki (2013: 76) argues that 'post-humanitarianism ultimately forgets that the moral education of the humanitarian imaginary is about pushing us beyond our comfort zone so as to grapple with the questions of who the 'human' is and why it is important to act on its cause'. Instead, a post-humanitarian culture offers 'neither justifications as to why we should act on the suffering of others nor the opportunity to confront the humanity of those others'. The suffering of others is encountered only through the 'imagination of ourselves' (Chouliaraki 2013: 77).

Following Chouliaraki's (2013) formulation, if the intention of post-apology cinema is to engage us imaginatively with the lived experience and suffering of others, in the *Come Walkabout* advertisements the lives of others are presented only as resources for our own self-reflection and self-expression as ethical consumers. The symbolic structure of post-apology cinema remains, but its politics and intention are lost. Nation-brands then are 'ambivalent' in the sense that while they borrow from our culture and identities (Banet-Weiser 2012: 92), they have no stake in the material outcomes of those processes (see Turner in this volume). Brands offer themselves as processes through which we construct our individual identities and make sense of shared ways of life, but only because that enables cultural life to be organised in market processes. Nation-brands may be undemocratic, but not because they fail to represent us, rather because they reformat public life as private exchange.

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