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Disturbing Performances of Race and Nation: King Bungaree, John Noble and Jimmy Clements

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Abstract

This essay is an exploration of the multiple cultural performances and performative Indigenous and non-Indigenous presences competing within events and erased by dominant narratives. The performance and performativity of race, class and culture for both black and white Australians in embodied performances and in accounts as a performative source of ideological meaning-making are critical factors within cross-cultural communications. The focus of this paper is on the dynamic between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous performances and presences within the enactment and documentation of two events separated by 100 years, a nineteenth century anecdote and a twentieth century 'historical' event.

Key words: performance, Indigenous studies, cultural history

Introduction

Generalisations about groups of people play a fundamental role in racialised representations in relation to both the dominant groupings and the marginalised and colonised within communities and nations. This essay is an exploration of the multiple cultural performances and performative presences competing within events and manipulated in dominant accounts into generalisations. The performance and performativity of race for both black and white Australians in embodied performances and in accounts that document events are part of the ideological meaning-making framing cross-cultural communications. A crucial element of this process is that within the documentary accounts, the non-Indigenous presence and their actions are presented as a singular norm and the foregrounded focus is on Indigenous performances and actions as anomalies. The motivation of this exploration is that misreadings, misunderstandings and misplacements of meaning continue to dominate the framing of Indigenous performances; therefore past practices still have impact in the present.

The focus of this paper is on the dynamic between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous performances and presences within a nineteenth century anecdote about an event in 1826 and a twentieth century 'historical' event in 1927. The anecdote located in 1826, about an Aboriginal man known as King Bungaree, was originally published in Charles Dickens' *All Year Round* (Anon 1859), reprinted in the *Sydney Gazette* later that year then reprinted and circulated through the USA, and in other sources in Australia and Britain in the following decades. The narrative of the historical event focuses on the actions of two Indigenous men and the responses to their presence at the opening of the first Federal Parliament House in Canberra in 1927. These two men known to Euro-Australians as John Noble or 'Marvellous' and Jimmy Clements used their complex understandings of performance to intervene in the event to make statements about the conditions under which Indigenous people were living and Indigenous sovereignty of the land. Performance in this context is understood as the type of public and social version of performance full of 'intentionally performative moments' highlighted by Philip Zarrilli and John MacAloon as 'occasions in which as a culture or society we... dramatize our collective myths and history, (Dolan 1993, 426).

Though neither everyday performance nor conventionally theatrical as such, these moments are consciously performed events for all participants. Given that the majority of sources about both events are European writers' accounts, the performances are mediated through culturally positioned accounts that performatively assert European cultural superiority. Drawing on Austin and Butler, I am using the term performativity in two ways, that is in reference to printed words and to the embodied presence, in both cases in relation to the ways that they are read and understood as meaningful constructions in terms of prescribed cultural meanings, specifically related to race and status.

Bungaree

Historically, Aboriginal Australian and Torres Strait Islander cultures have been woven around and through performance. Highly developed performance traditions and practices were a central and important element within and across cultures and life. Equally, since the corroborees that marked the arrival of the first fleet of European colonisers to Australia in the eighteenth century, performance has been and continues to be a central point of cross-cultural communication, if not always cultural understanding. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the European attitudes and framing of Indigenous performance were an important part of containing and colonising Indigenous cultures and the land. The Europeans, confident in their beliefs of cultural superiority had to accommodate Indigenous performance and the performative elements of cultural exchanges in a way that supported imperialist narratives. This frame of understanding is revealed in most European accounts of encounters and exchanges with Indigenous people and their cultures.

Bungaree of the Carigal clan of the Kuringgai was one of the most well known Aboriginal men in the early colony of NSW. In 1815, he was the first Aboriginal man to be appointed 'King' by Governor Lachlan Macquarie as part of the campaign to bring Indigenous authority under English control. The anecdote about Bungaree emphasizes his sophisticated understanding and expectations of performance codes in formal cross-cultural encounters and the often forced misconstructions imposed by the European audience. In about 1826, the commodore and officers of the Warspite thought it would be amusing to receive Bungaree 'with all the honours and formality accorded to persons of royal blood' (Anon 1859, 79). Bungaree arrived at the reception on the boat wearing his coat buttoned up to the neck, in the exact style of the then Governor of the colony, Sir Ralph Darling, and he reproduced precisely Darling's mannerisms and behaviour at this type of formal review. Bungaree:

... received the homage which was paid him by the Commodore, with just the amount of formal emprossment that the Governor himself would have exhibited, under the circumstances of being similarly greeted. Having bowed, rather stiffly, to each of the officers on the quarter-deck, and having cast an approving though cold glance at the guns, the hammock-nettings, and the rigging, King Bungaree condescended to inquire the Commodore's name 'My name is Brisbane,' said the Commodore, meekly. Bungaree, for at least two minutes, surveyed the Commodore from head to foot, with a contemptuous expression of countenance. He had known one Brisbane [Sir Thomas, the previous colonial Governor, 1821-1825], who had only lately left the Colony... That there could be two Brisbanes... King Bungaree could not believe. At length His Majesty spoke as follows, 'What you mean, sa? You Brisbane, sa?... I know Brisbane, sa. He great frien'-o'-mine, sa... No, sa; you are not Governor Brisbane, sa. I show these gennelmen Governor Brisbane, sa.' Divesting himself, for the nonce, of the airs and manners of Sir Ralph Darling, Bungaree put on those of Sir Thomas Brisbane, walked the deck, spoke to several of the officers, and, taking a telescope from the hand of the signal-midshipman of the day, looked through it into the heavens, and exclaimed, 'Ah!' Sir Thomas Brisbane was a great astronomer, and while in New South Wales had been constantly star-gazing. The Commodore was so struck with King Bungaree's imitation of his own first cousin, that he stood aghast; while the officers unable any longer to preserve their gravity, indulged in a peal of hearty laughter. 'No, sa,' resumed Bungaree, addressing the Commodore, and acting General Darling, 'you not Brisbane' (Anon 1859, 77).

This anecdote about an individual presents a glimpse of the larger picture of cross-cultural communication and the often useful (to Euro-Australians) misunderstandings of these performances in the early years of colonisation. Baz Kershaw in relation to theatre performances argues that the efficacy of a performance is the result of an ideological transaction between performer and audience, where the ideology is the source of the collective ability to code and encode a performance in order to make sense of it (2000, 137). This ideological meaning making establishes the horizon of expectation that frames the work and sets the terms on which it will be understood (138-139). This analysis is equally relevant to performances outside the context of a formal theatre. In this context, however, the audiences' ideological transactions are separate from the performers'. Though I would suggest that the performer intervenes in the officers' shared decoding whether they acknowledge it or not, their expectations based on pre-existing beliefs and knowledges circumscribe their reception and understanding of Bungaree's performance.

The encounter demonstrates the ways in which Bungaree understood and expected multiple layers of performance codes relating to rank, culture and event to be part of the exchange. Bungaree's mimicry of Darling's dress and behaviours demonstrates his acute observation and recognition of the performance codes related to status and official European events of welcome. The incident also demonstrates the high skill levels that are developed within Indigenous societies and cultures that value and practice theatrical and social performance in daily and spiritual life. The depth of the mimicry of Brisbane, including his physical mannerisms and his intellectual pursuits, all recognisable to those like the Commander who were acquainted with the original, implies both acute observation and Bungaree's expectation that his mimicry will be recognised, understood and appreciated. The event also demonstrates the performance by the officers of their self perceived position in relation to Bungaree and the disjunction between their assumptions about him and his actual embodied performance. Regardless of how he played with their expectations, he is received and framed as a source of amusement and entertainment, fulfilling the role of the foolish clown. The officers on the other hand are represented as normative English gentlemen.

The notion of competing ideological transactions is even more useful as a way to interpret the documenting of the event afterwards. In the original article, that effectively styles itself as a biography of Bungaree, the tone is very much the indulgent and amused superior person until the end when Bungaree is recognised as important because he was a witness to settlement and can speak of what is 'gone' (Anon 1859, 83). The article was published anonymously; Keith Vincent Smith (1992) makes a case suggesting the possible author may have been Peter Miller Cunningham who spent some years in NSW and that a substantial part of the article is probably apocryphal possibly further adorned with humorous touches by Dickens himself (155-156). Despite the apocryphal trimmings, there are a number of features in the article that are recognizable as Bungaree from other documentation especially in relation to the anecdote. Though the Warspite, with Commodore Brisbane, arrived in Sydney in 1826, Brisbane himself was ill at the time, so this anecdote may have been constructed from other tales. Brisbane, who died later that same year, was known to have liked Bungaree and presented him with a full suit of his own uniform. Therefore it is not improbable that the anecdote may have been a story that was repeatedly told of their first meeting. Many of the details of the anecdote are supported by other evidence. For example, Bungaree is documented regularly meeting ships as they arrived in the harbour. Bungaree was known as the Chief of the Broken Bay natives (*Sydney Gazette & NSW Advertiser*, Feb 8 1817, 2). The following notice suggests he used his appropriation of high level officials' mannerisms and speech to negotiate as an elder:

His sable majesty, Bungaree, attended at the Police Office last week, by order of the Superintendent, and received instructions to warn his own immediate liegis, as well as the chiefs of other tribes, that rioting, drunkenness, and disturbing the quiet of the streets at night, would invariably be followed by the punishment of the tread-mill, or, confinement with hard labour. Bungaree bowed politely, promised to use every exertion to carry the orders of their Worships into effect, and retired. (*Sydney Gazette & NSW Advertiser*, March 25 1826, 2)

In the event on the Warspite, the performative presence of Bungaree in the account is reduced to the clown, yet it is the white officers of the ship that are unable to deal with the event on multiple levels. The focus of the story is on both Bungaree's skills and the implied claim that he was unable to comprehend that two people could have the same name. Bungaree had been dealing with Englishmen for more than 40 years at this stage. He had acted as a guide and interpreter for Matthew Flinders in his explorations

and, as indicated in the quote above, dealt with police and judges. In this context, it is unlikely that he would be unfamiliar with the possibility of more than one English man having the same surname. The ideological-meaning making for the white reader presents the embodied performance as clever in its mimicry but most entertaining in his incomprehension of subtleties. As J J Healy (1978), who has a similar reading of the event to the one outlined here, described it this framing reduces the mimicry to 'the speechless talent of gifted animals' (20). I would suggest that rather than being unable to understand two men having the same surname, Bungaree was consciously playing with the Commander and the officers, perhaps in repayment for their game at his expense, perhaps to ensure they rewarded him for his performance with clothes and tobacco or perhaps both.



Portrait of Bungaree, a native of NSW, with Fort Macquarie, Sydney harbour in the background' painted by Augustus Earle 1826. Reproduced with permission of National Library of Australia {nla pic an2256865}.

John Noble and Jimmy Clements

In February 2008, a performed and highly performative event took place in Canberra; conducted by Matilda House-Williams on behalf of the Ngambri People, the first Welcome to Country ceremony to mark the opening of an Australian Federal Parliament session. In the discussions around the 'Welcome to Country', the name of Jimmy Clements and his visit to the opening of the old Parliament house in 1927 was widely acknowledged, possibly for the first time since the accounts of the original event. Yet, even in this context, most accounts repeated the same partial information, that Jimmy Clements attended the ceremony but was led away by a policeman (Wright 2008, 15). This is a version of the story that has been repeated in many historical and media accounts. For example, Manning Clark wrote in 1980 that:

On that day thirty to forty thousand people gathered outside Parliament House in that small city of undulating plain and open sky to watch the arrival of the Duke and Duchess. As they stood on the steps of the new white building, Dame Nellie Melba sang God Save the King. (220)

He went on to note that: 'A solitary aborigine demanded to see the 'whole plurry show', but as he was deemed to be inadequately clad for the occasion, a policeman led him away.'

This story presents an image of a single man who tried and failed to attend an important Australian ceremony. Basic to this story is the claim that he was just there to have a look. The full story is much richer and the forces of exclusion were not as effective as they are all too often represented and the Indigenous presence was neither helpless nor passive nor, I would suggest, just there by chance or as a tourist. A close reading of the reportage of the event in terms of the competing performances, and the recording of the subversive and protest elements within the event, reveals a complex series of performances and counter performances. Elsewhere, I have focused on revealing and analysing the Indigenous performances within the event over the two days (Casey 2007, *passim*). In this paper, the focus is on the dynamic between the performances and counter performances in the hours before the official ceremony.

When the Duke and Duchess of York officially opened the new Australian national parliament house, the important, the local and the military all attended to mark the occasion with due ceremony. Described at the time as a 'pageant of empire' and a 'ceremonial display intended to engrave upon the memory of a nation the great events of its history' (*SMH*, 'Auroral heralds: Australia's bannered strong hold', May 10 1927, 13), the opening ceremony was performance that acted as a ritual of ownership, of sovereignty and control of the land. The opening ceremony was staged over two days, Monday 9 and Tuesday 10 May, 1927, and performed theatrically right down to rehearsals and costumes including naval and military dress uniforms, judges' and ecclesiastical robes. (*SMH*, 'The review', May 10 1927, 15; *SMH Canberra Supplement*, 'Canberra pageant', May 9 1927, 13; *Argus*, 'Rehearsing the ceremonial', May 9 1927, 21). As the *SMH Canberra Supplement* stated in summary 'the stage is brilliantly set for the historic ceremony (1927, 1).

The repetitive message in the media, that a 'new era [was]...to be inaugurated' (*Argus*, 'Historic ceremony at Canberra today', May 9 1927, 19), set the tone for how the event was to be perceived and understood. After months of daily coverage of the preparations, there was extensive media coverage on both days, in print and radio as well as film. Central to the press coverage of the event is the focus on the celebration of white Australia and the effective erasure of Indigenous Australia (for example see *SMH Canberra Supplement*, 'The story of Canberra', May 9 1927, 1).

'White Australia' occurs in numerous places, especially framing the Australian population as one blood, one language, one people (*SMH Canberra Supplement*, 'White Australia', May 9 1927, 3). The newspapers were literally full of 'Odes to white Australia' (*SMH Canberra Supplement* 1927, 1). There was a suggestion at one point in the planning of the event that a corroboree should be included in the entertainment but that was not taken up. However, though the Indigenous Australian presence as a counter narrative to white Australia was not officially included, two Indigenous elders attended the ceremony and though the police attempted to lead them away (and this act is described frequently enough to suggest that they were both led away more than once) this was not the whole story.ⁱ

As I have discussed elsewhere, it is interesting to read the accounts of the events in terms of the Indigenous presence (Casey 2007, *passim*). Firstly, there was either none, reflecting no doubt that the local population (despite the nearby community in Queanbeyan) no longer existed. Then there are the accounts of one person present; an alternation between absence and anomaly. Though some historical accounts favour absence, a number of press accounts at the time acknowledge the presence of one Indigenous person at the event. Who that one was varies according to the different written accounts. The two men who attended were John Noble and Nangar known as King Billy or Jimmy Clements.ⁱⁱ Noble, known as 'Marvellous', was photographed repeatedly on the day, including photographs with policemen. The habit of first renaming Indigenous people with European names and then renaming them again with nick names is to say the least problematic, in the case of Noble, he was said to be called Marvellous because of his habit of constantly declaring everything 'marvellous'. Clements was also photographed extensively at the event and his photo printed in newspapers and magazines, usually identified as 'Marvellous' (*Argus*, 'Demanded his rights', May 11 1927, 20; *The Federal Capital Pioneer Magazine* July 20 1927, 1 (9), 21; *Sun News Pictorial*, May 11 1927, 16; Moore 1999, 201).



Jimmy Clements, known as King Billy (left), and John Noble, known as Marvellous (right). Prior to the opening ceremony possibly in the previous summer in a regional town in NSW. Reproduced with permission from National Library of Australia [nlapic 4199751].

Clements was a well-known and well respected 'clever man' who performed Wiradjuri burbong (initiation) ceremonies in districts all over southeast Australia including and for those that had traditionally followed the bunan (initiation) ceremonial lines (Gillespie 1984, 49-50).ⁱⁱⁱ Clements was also kin to the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples and accepted as part of the Ngunnawal community. Clements had walked from Brungle Aboriginal station in the Tumut district, where he was then in residence, in order to be at the opening ceremony, a distance of around 150 kilometres.^{iv} He was then over 80 years old.^v Noble was also known as a clever man and he travelled extensively throughout southeast New South Wales sometimes working as a shepherd and regularly performing at agricultural shows. He was known for his boomerang throwing and gave exhibitions at shows and football matches across NSW (*Gundagai Times*, 'Marvellous is dead', March 30 1928, 5; *Bega District News*, April 2 1928, 7). He had a reputation for attending political meetings. He was also about 80 years old in 1927. He may have walked to Canberra from anywhere in southern NSW from Cootamundra to Sydney, this would mean a distance anywhere from 150 to 300 kilometres. So, both Clements and Noble were elders and clever men, men of authority and status in their communities, both born somewhere in the 1840s observing and experiencing the processes and changes wrought by colonisation. They had both travelled long distances to be present at the event.

In the press at the time, they are presented as one individual who attracted a great deal of attention on both days. In the *Argus* May 10, 1927, under the heading 'Aborigine defends his rights', ran the story:

During the wait great interest was taken in the appearance near the east stand of an aborigine, a member of the Gundagal tribe. And a well known character in the district. He was very old and grey and raggedly picturesque. He was determined to go his own way in spite of the arguments of two inspectors and one sergeant of police. (15)

The description of the Euro-Australian crowd's response sets the tone of the representations of the dynamic between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians at the event in all press accounts that acknowledge the presence of either man:

Immediately and instinctively the crowds on the stand rallied to his side. There were choruses of advice and encouragement to him to do as he pleased. A well known clergy man stood up and called out that the aborigine had a better right than any man present to a place on the steps of the House of Parliament and in the Senate during the ceremony. The old man's persistence and the sympathy of the crowd won him an excellent position, and also a shower of small change that must have amounted to 30 or 40 shillings. (15)

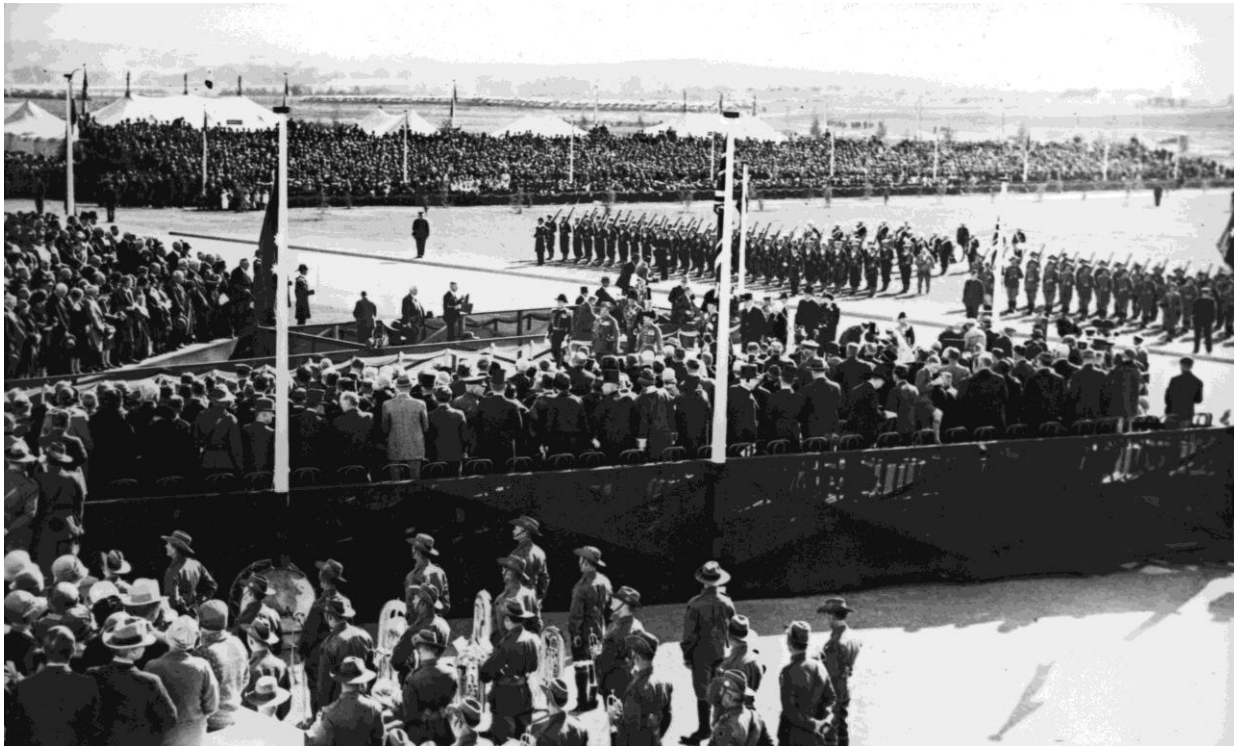
This performance of white benevolence occurred in a context where the Indigenous men's presence required a delicate process of negotiation. This was a time when Indigenous people were segregated onto reserves, legislative acts framed them as children and the contemporary newspapers ran articles quoting Baldwin Spencer describing them as doomed and remnants of a dying race (for example see *Canberra Times*, 'Aborigines: A passing race', December 30, 1926, 5).

Their literal physical vulnerability is demonstrated both by the number of contemporary massacres, and the standard practice of forcibly relocating and incarcerating Indigenous people labelled as 'incorrigible', 'destitute', 'a larrikin', or 'a wanderer' to places such as Palm Island.^{vi} Yet here we have a crowd of white Australians in the act of celebrating 'white' Australia loudly siding with the Indigenous person. This occurred prior to the initial opening ceremony on May 9th.

After all the rehearsals and careful choreography, the official ceremony outside Parliament house, apart from Dame Nellie Melba singing 'God Save the King', only lasted about 10 minutes. Recurring in the media coverage are references to dignity, the dignity of the occasion and the dignified behaviour of the crowd: 'the vast audience had behaved with dignity and decorum' (Historic ceremony). Despite this representation of the event, the hours preceding the arrival of the Duke and Duchess of York were not quite so dignified. Underneath all that dignity many people had actually camped overnight in a very cold Canberra field in May then waited in place for hours.

The event was planned around thousands of invited guests and official visitors. There were grandstands built to seat these official invited guests; members of the judiciary, parliamentarians and anyone with a claim to importance across the country. The stands for the Commonwealth guests formed wings on either side of the entrance of Parliament House. The stands for States' invited guests formed a 'broken horseshoe' out from the wings. The photo shows the front area where dignitaries were received and across the top, one side of the states' stands. Completing the semi circle, beyond these stands in an area of rising ground was an area roped off and set aside for people other than the invited guests (*Canberra Times Weekly Edition*, Jan 20 1927, 1). These uninvited members of the general public, when they were acknowledged, were literally referred to as 'unofficial visitors' (Canberra ceremonies 1927, 19). The roped off area was for these people and only invited guests were allowed in the grandstands. If the photos are any gauge, only those in the grandstands and immediately behind the barriers could actually see anything. The roped off area quickly became very crowded, and 'congested' (*SMH*, 'Opening of Federal Parliament in Canberra', May 10 1927, 14).

Most of the crowd was waiting in place from sunrise at 7.30am as the frost started to melt, the remainder arriving between then and 9.30am. The planned events were to start with the royal visitors arriving at 11am. The people in the public area were crushed and could not see and were getting grumpy around the edges. Many wandered around the back of stands and the general area. 'The Canberra turnout', wrote the *Labour Call*, 'seems to have been a bit of a frost' (Clark 1980, 220).



Troops, Spectators, Army Band and official assembled outside Parliament House for the ceremonial opening of the Commonwealth Parliament, Canberra, 9 May 1927 Source National Archives of Australia: A3348, 33

As many of the invited guests from the States did not attend, this left stands half to three quarters empty in contrast to the overcrowding in the general public area. At about 10am the decision was made for the sake of the appearance and success of the event to let some of the unofficial visitors into the stands. The barriers were removed and those nearest allowed to occupy the stands (*Argus*, 'Canberra ceremony historic scene', May 10 1927). The unofficial visitors who were allowed in were presumably happier, though not demonstrably grateful for the late attention. Some sections continued to be vocal in their comments about the event and to entertain themselves as the dignitaries arrived, making loud, humorous and absurd suggestions about whom they might possibly be that bore no resemblance to reality. Two men with a telescope observed and loudly 'commented' on the 'peculiarities and mannerisms of the "great"' (*SMH Canberra Supplement*, 'Auroral heralds: Australia's bannered strong hold', May 10 1927, 13). There was also 'the occasional expression of the opinion that the whole ceremony was arranged for the comfort of the few and with little regard for that of the remainder' (*Argus* 1927). Despite the narratives that repeatedly claimed the crowd performed with the dignity of the occasion, a disgruntled crowd, whose anti-authoritarian side was showing, were demonstrating that they felt that the celebration of the white nation was not as inclusive as it might have been.

It was just after this point that the event recorded in the newspaper, of the crowd siding with the Indigenous man against the police, occurred. It was no small thing for Clements or Noble to resist the police at an event where there were hundreds of police and military. It is only speculation, but I doubt that it was sheer chance that the crowd became embroiled in the argument between the Indigenous man and the police. Given the nature of the event and the fact that sections of the crowd were already vocally disgruntled, I think it reasonable to assume that the police would have wanted to remove the man quietly and quickly, hence in the account in the *Argus*, there were three policemen engaged in his removal.

The Indigenous presence was certainly spectacularised in the event. The photos give a sense of the large crowd and yet his presence was known and noted across a wide area, large enough to include most of the journalists present and a remarkable number of personal accounts. This implies to me, at the least, a strong performance element where the man chose to play to the crowd and, specifically, or at least, finally, to the vocal and anti-authoritarian part of the crowd.

As discussed earlier, both Indigenous men worked public events and thoroughfares, in a context where the Indigenous racialised presence was marked and vulnerable. Therefore, reading the audience and knowing how to woo them through performance would be critical for survival as well as income.

There are many versions of the event that claim categorically that the Aboriginal man was led away quietly by the police. These include contemporary newspaper accounts such as the photo of Clements published with the caption 'This is Marvellous!' and the story that he 'wanted to join the official party and had to be escorted away by the police' (*Sun News Pictorial* 1927, 16) and historical accounts that include the story told by Manning Clark. More recently, in the late 1980s, approaching the Bicentenary of European settlement there was extensive response to articles published in the *Canberra Times* about the Indigenous presence at the 1927 opening ceremony (Hefner 1987a, 7; Hefner Dec 27 1987b, 7). The initial article appears to have been in response to Indigenous social memories that place at least two Indigenous elders at the event. The responses to the article indicate a strong white social memory supporting the later historical accounts that there had only been one Indigenous person present, Jimmy Clements, and that he was quickly removed. One letter writer to the *Canberra Times* in 1988, who was present at the original event, responded that 'there was only one Aboriginal anywhere in the area and he was gently led away by a constable (NSW Police) to some place towards the rear of the building and he did not reappear, nor did any other Aboriginal people at any time during that day' (*Canberra Times*, 1988). This level of conviction is not an isolated example (see Hefner 1987a & 1987b). Not only is the presence spectacularised but the level of that spectacularising must indeed be phenomenal for someone to be so certain not only about who was present in a crowd of well over 40,000 people,^{vii} but also positive about all their actions.

Given the conflicting stories, and the level of conviction expressed by the opposing witnesses, it is not unreasonable to speculate that perhaps the different versions are true as far as they go. It would make sense of the witness accounts if Clements and/or Noble had tried to win other sections of the grandstands and not succeeding were led away by the police. Then moved around the back of the stands and chose a different grouping to play to, repeating the performance until he succeeded in winning support for his presence in the stands. This is supported by the different details in the accounts varying from one to three policemen. It is not improbable that both men may have worked their way from different sides until one of them succeeded in gaining the necessary support to be able to remain. This scenario would allow for numerous witnesses to the removal of the Aboriginal man as well as the witnesses to his winning support and a place in the stands.

This possible scenario suggests that, within this spectacle of the white nation, class politics and race politics merge and engage through the skills of one or more performers. Rather than serendipitously finding a pocket of people whose behaviour ran counter to the current norms, the crowd's response is the result of persistence with strategic risks and performances. A crowd within the event feeling alienated from the foregrounded performance of a single nation chose to perform a different type of whiteness and through that performatively claiming power in relation to both the police and the Indigenous man. It also suggests that the incident is an example of the ways in which white responses to Indigenous Australians tend to be emotional, tied to the moment and mood rather than a general recognition and respect for human rights.

Conclusion

The two stories focus on three Aboriginal community elders. Bungaree was invited to be received officially as a joke, to be treated as free entertainment for the ship's officers and crew. When he engaged with the event demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of the expected behaviours and norms, the white officers did not shift in claiming and performing the authority and knowledge of the social situation, ignoring anything that did not fit their preconceptions. Despite this framing, Bungaree was personally acquainted with every Governor of the colony during his lifetime. He gained materially for himself and his people from these acquaintances and acted as a mediator for his people and other groupings. His habit of meeting every new arrival to the colony in itself contested claims of *terra nullius*.

Equally, though bound by racialised regulations and uninvited, Noble and Clements marked the opening ceremony in powerful ways. Implicitly and explicitly, in the framing of the event, the land and all sovereignty was claimed by an identified singular white Australia. Contesting these nationally and internationally publicized claims, Noble and Clements ensured that they were present and seen by both the white Australian crowd and international visitors, particularly the representatives of British sovereignty.

Regardless of whether they were as unaware or indifferent to the meaning of the event as is often suggested, their presence was a powerful act, contesting claims of the erasure of Indigenous people from the land and place. They were embodied counter narratives of the celebration of the white nation made up of 'one blood, one people'. The same newspapers, that for months had carried articles about the dawning of a new era for White Australia, all featured photos and reports of Clements claiming rights and sovereignty. Within the performance of Australia and the celebration of Euro Australians' collective myths about Australia, their words, presence and photos disturb the singular dominant narrative.

In the twenty-first century, their presence and their words continue to act powerfully, challenging popular ideas that Indigenous resistance only began in the 1960s and 1970s. Despite the erasure or reframing over time of the Indigenous presence from what was celebrated as a seminal white Australian event, their presence must be negotiated and absorbed in some way within claims of white sovereignty and white history of Canberra and the Australian nation. In both these events, the performance choices create space for the Indigenous presence and authority within a context of cross-cultural communication and attempts to erase Aboriginal Australia.

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ⁱ There is footage in two films made at the time that show Jimmy Clements at the event, *Birth of a white Australia. An historic and romantic record of our country* (1928) and *T. R. M. The Duke and Duchess of York Visit Canberra* (1927). There is also footage within the former film showing other Indigenous people present but the authenticity of that footage is contested.

ⁱⁱ David Kaus's work in 1995 seems to be the first attempt to document the presence of both men at the event. See David Kaus. 1995. 'Jimmy Clements and John Noble at the opening of Parliament House in 1927', Canberra: National Museum.

ⁱⁱⁱ There were changes as communities moved in the face of climate changes and European settlement. Ann Jackson-Nakano. 2001. *The Kamberri Weereewaa History series Vol 1* Canberra; Aboriginal History, 172.

^{iv} Tumut is a regional town situated 390 km west of Sydney in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains.

^v Noble's death certificate, issued a year later, claimed he was 99 when he died. Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths, NSW, No 3954. Jimmy Clements, died a few months later. Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths, NSW, No 15681. see Ann Jackson-Nakano 2001. *The Kamberri*.

^{vi} Examples include the massacres at Bedford Downs 1924 and the Omalmerri massacres by police and settlers in the East Kimberley 1926, and at Forrest River in 1926.

^{vii} The official estimates of the crowd was 35,000 but many observers put the number well above this number. *Queanbeyan Times*, 'Federal Parliament House: opened by Duke of York'. 1927. May 10, 1.