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The Possessive Logic of Settler-Invader Nations in Olympic Ceremonies.

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The Possessive Logic of Settler-Invader Nations in Olympic Ceremonies.

Staging an Olympic Games offers hosts a unique opportunity to showcase their nation as a tourist destination. This opportunity is particularly exploited in the opening and closing ceremonies that are able to attract unparalleled international television audiences. Over the first 11 decades or so of the modern Olympic movement, as the ceremonies have become more complex and spectacular, they have developed their own generic conventions of national storytelling. Therefore, it is possible to compare prevailing national ideologies in these ceremonies and ascertain how and where shifts and changes in them are taking place.

In this paper I analyse the opening and closing ceremonies of the 13 summer and winter Olympic Games that have been hosted in nations that were formerly part of the British Empire (the United States of America, Australia and Canada). I analyse the similarities and differences of these ceremonies in order to better understand the discursive construction of settler-invader national stories that is going on within them. I focus on three aspects: who has the right to welcome visitors, how a discourse of 'unity in diversity' is mobilised and how the historical fact of violent dispossession is managed. Informed by the work of Aileen Moreton-Robinson, I propose that these ceremonies can be read as manifestations of the possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty and, as such, that the changes that occur from one to the next tell us a great deal about how settler-invader nations successfully manage Indigenous challenges to the legitimacy of their national stories.

Keywords: Olympics; ceremonies; nationalism; indigeneity.

Introduction

The Olympic Games offer a unique and ideal platform from which to represent nations and nationalities. As Jackie Hogan puts it: 'the Olympic Games, are key sites in the discursive construction of nation' (Hogan, 2003). This is especially so for the host nation, giving it an opportunity to promote itself to potential tourists.¹ This provides the strongest motivation for powerful elites within cities to bid for the right to host the Games which, therefore, brings with it an obligation to undertake a particular type of national storytelling: one which will show the nation in the best possible light.

¹ For discussion of these perceived benefits to hosting the games see Gold & Gold, 2008; Roche, 2000; Toohey & Veal, 2007.

The opportunity to tell positive national stories is particularly effective in the ritualised aspects of the Games, especially the opening and closing ceremonies. In this paper I explore how discourses of nationhood operate within Olympic ceremonies. My scope is limited to one type of national story: that of settler-invader nations which have a relatively short ‘useable past’ on which to draw and a recent imagined national beginning.² I concentrate here on those that were British colonies: the United States of America (USA), Australia and Canada. My focus in this paper is how and the extent to which these dominant stories of settler-invader nations deal with the twin truths of originary indigenous sovereignty and their violent invasion of it. While these twin truths are just that – true – they can nevertheless be painful to acknowledge and difficult to accommodate into a positive national story that ‘showcases’ the nation to a global tourist audience. It is little wonder, then, that together they take an uneasy place within the ceremonies in these nations.

In this paper I read the ceremonies of these Olympic Games chronologically and collectively. While there are methodological limitations to reading them in this way, their many ideological and narrative similarities afford productive analytical opportunities. What we see emerging is a series of gradual concessions by settler-invader national stories to Indigenous stories alongside some stubborn refusals to concede. Together these reflect a concomitant shift in colonial attitudes toward Indigenous issues within settler-invader nations and offer compelling evidence of

² A good definition of settler-invader colonies is offered by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in their *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. They argue that: ‘in post-colonial/colonial discourse, this term is often used to distinguish between two types of European colonies: settler (or settler-invader) colonies and colonies of occupation. Nigeria and India are examples of colonies of occupation, where indigenous people remained in the majority but were administered by a foreign power. Examples of settler colonies where, over time, the invading Europeans (or their descendants) annihilated, displaced and/or marginalized the indigenes to become a majority non-indigenous population, include Argentina, Australia, Canada and the United States’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2000).

Indigenous politics gaining ground within them. At the same time, they highlight what remains unsayable in these dominant national stories. The Games under consideration are listed in Table 1.

Year	City	Games	Country
1904	St Louis	Summer	USA
1932	Los Angeles	Summer	USA
1932	Lake Placid	Winter	USA
1956	Melbourne	Summer	Australia
1960	Squaw Valley	Winter	USA
1976	Montreal	Summer	Canada
1980	Lake Placid	Winter	USA
1984	Los Angeles	Summer	USA
1988	Calgary	Winter	Canada
1996	Atlanta	Summer	USA
2000	Sydney	Summer	Australia
2002	Salt Lake City	Winter	USA
2010	Vancouver	Winter	Canada

Table 1: Olympic Games Hosted in the USA, Australia and Canada

National Stories and the Possessive Logic of Settler-invader Nations

Informing my analysis of these opening ceremonies is a body of scholarship that is interested in nationalism and national story telling. As Hogan makes clear ‘Nations are more than geopolitical entities; they are discursively constructed ‘imagined communities’ (Hogan, 2003). Here Hogan draws on the work of Benedict Anderson who argues that nations come into being, are maintained and protected through a shared set of cultural representations which together constitute a set of narratives, or stories. While these stories are maintained and protected through repetitive retelling, they are also ‘modular’ in that, as Anderson puts it, ‘they are capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations’ (Anderson, 2006). These national stories, therefore, can take many forms including songs (particularly national anthems), cartography,

educational curricula, public architecture and monuments. National stories can be put to use in ways that both support and critique the structures of hegemonic power within these nations. As Hogan puts it: ‘whereas widely circulating discourses of national identity may generally serve to reproduce relations of dominance, they may also reflect and fuel social change’ (Hogan, 2003). I am interested in how oppositional or resistant narratives challenge dominant national stories within these ceremonies. In other words, I’m interested in how these stories are maintained (how they stay the same) and how, when and why they are challenged (how they change).

National stories can be collected into groups that share similar heritages. The similarities of settler-invader national stories mean that they can be usefully considered as being in the same ‘narrative’ group. There is a very specific quality to the settler-invader national story that interests me here in particular: their possessive logic. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson puts it:

The British imperial project was predicated on taking possession of other peoples’ lands and resources for the benefit of Empire. ... The right to take possession was embedded in British and international common law and rationalised through a discourse of civilisation that supported war, physical occupation and the will and desire to possess. ... Possession and nationhood are thus constituted symbiotically. (Moreton-Robinson, 2005)

From this logic, Moreton-Robinson argues, accrues an understanding of ‘nation that in its denial of Indigenous sovereignty is perceived to be a white possession’ (Moreton-Robinson, 2005). Further, she argues, this possessive logic is predicated on exclusion: ‘that is it denies and refuses what it does not own – the sovereignty of the Indigenous other’ (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). A key point that Moreton-Robinson makes is that this possessive logic operates both ‘ideologically, that is it operates at the level of beliefs, and discursively at the level of epistemology, to naturalise the nation as a white possession’ (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). Like Moreton-Robinson, I

use this idea of a possessive logic to denote a ‘mode of rationalisation, rather than a set of positions that produce a more or less inevitable answer, that is underpinned by an excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation-state’s ownership, control and domination’ (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). Therefore, settler-invader nations are interested (Moreton-Robinson would suggest obsessively so) in the telling and retelling of national stories that reinforce this possessive logic in order to protect the need for control which is at their heart. I am interested, therefore, in reading these opening ceremonies to show how they operate both ideologically and discursively in the telling of settler-invader national stories and, as Moreton-Robinson puts it, how they ‘circulate sets of meanings about white ownership of the nation, as part of a common sense knowledge’ (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). In this paper I will analyse how these ceremonies include and acknowledge indigenous peoples’ originary sovereignty of the land on which the Olympic Games is held alongside the acknowledgement (or lack thereof) that this sovereignty was violently and deliberately invaded and dispossessed in the process of colonisation. To do this, I will focus on who is deemed to have the right to welcome and/or farewell visiting athletes, officials and spectators to the land, how a discourse of ‘unity in diversity’ is mobilised and how the historical fact of violent dispossession is managed.

Reading Olympic Ceremonies

The opening and closing ceremonies of Olympic Games have both maintained and accumulated formal protocols and informal generic conventions throughout their history.³ They were fairly perfunctory prior to the use of satellites to broadcast

³ Since the first modern Games in Athens in 1896, all Games have been officially opened by the host nation’s head of state or their delegated representative. The raising of the five-ringed flag, the taking of the athlete’s oath and the release of doves to symbolise peace

television images in real time in the 1970s.⁴ This, combined with the intensity of the cold war in the late 1970s and early 1980s when the Moscow and Los Angeles ceremonies tried to out do each other, means that ceremonies since the early 1980s are substantively different to those that came before, and should be read as such.

Specifically, the more recent ceremonies have taken the opportunity to present an ‘interpretive cultural performance’ (Hogan, 2003). This aspect of the ceremony, while once a very minor part, now dominates costing millions of dollars and consuming the energies of thousands of (often volunteer) performers. In comparison to the relative gravitas and formality of opening ceremonies, the closing ceremonies of Olympic Games tend to be irreverent, informal and even self-deprecating: a party of celebration. It is at these ceremonies, when there is nothing left to lose, that some of the most powerful resistant and oppositional stories of nation have been told. The ceremonies of the Winter Games have lagged behind those of the Summer Games in terms of their complexity and story telling. In all ceremonies the interpretive cultural performance is generally read as the key moment of national storytelling, but Hogan makes the important point that all aspects of the opening and closing ceremonies can be read this way (Hogan, 2003). For the purposes of this paper I will be reading both formal and informal aspects of the ceremonies under consideration.

The Ceremonies

St Louis 1904, Los Angeles and Lake Placid 1932

first took place at the 1920 summer Olympics in Antwerp. The Olympic flame was first lit in the 1928 Games in Amsterdam. The first torch relay took place for the 1936 Berlin summer Games and the first officials’ oath was taken at the 1972 winter Olympics in Sapporo. The entrance of athletes from all nations combined together into one group for the closing ceremony first took place at the Melbourne summer games of 1956. Many of these are now formally enshrined in IOC code.

⁴ The first experiments in the use of geostationary satellites to broadcast television images were during the 1964 Summer Games held in Tokyo.

Even though there was little in the way of official ceremony for the first of the games under consideration here, it is of interest because it is the first Games that had direct participation from Indigenous peoples. Like the Paris and London Games before and after them, the 1904 St Louis games were held in conjunction with a world's fair.⁵ Many of the events at these Olympics are now remembered as farcical but by far the most curious and infamous events were the two 'anthropology days' held on 12-13th August.⁶

One of the most popular attractions at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition was the anthropological exhibit that included live human displays of indigenous peoples from around the world.⁷ The main objective of the anthropology days was to test the claims that had been made about the speed, stamina and strength of Indigenous peoples by anthropologists at conferences during the Fair. The organisers of the event were disappointed with the results and argued that this debunked the anthropologists' claims. From this first ignominious engagement with Indigenous peoples and cultures

⁵ In all three of these Games, the sporting events were subsumed in the then larger and more important 'mega-event' of the World's Fair.

⁶ Prime amongst these 'farcical' events was the marathon, during which several runners were chased miles off course by a vicious dog, with no refreshment stations one athlete stopped to slake his thirst and hunger in an orchard of under-ripe fruit and suffered horrendous consequences not long after and the first marathon runner to cross the line, Fred Lorz, was disqualified after it was discovered he had covered 11 miles of the course in a car. Curiously, the American gymnast George Eyser won six medals despite the fact that he had a wooden leg. For more information on the Anthropology Days, see Brownell, 2008.

⁷ Amounting to little more than a human zoo, the majority of people on display were from the newly acquired American colony of the Philippines and Indigenous people from the North American continent. There were also other indigenous people from Patagonia, Ainu from Japan and Inuit from Canada. Other indigenous peoples were displayed in the Pike: a show alongside the fair for which visitors paid extra admission. Geronimo, then a prisoner of war, was on display there, selling signed photographs to spectators. Several Africans participated in the Anthropology Days and while some of these were in anthropology exhibits, others were part of the Boer War re-enactment that was performed twice daily at the fair. Two of these men, Len Taunyane and Jan Mahiani, both Tswana tribesmen, entered in the infamous marathon event and became the first African athletes to participate in Olympic competition. For more information on the Anthropology exhibits at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, see Parezo & Fowler, 2007; Rydell, 1984.

there would be very little direct inclusion or involvement with Indigenous people for nearly seven decades.⁸

By the time of the 1932 Los Angeles and Lake Placid Games, the bare bones of the Olympics Opening ceremony were in place. The opening ceremonial components of both Games were little more than the spectacle of teams marching into the stadium and the reading of oaths. There was no reference to Indigenous culture in either Games' ceremonies.

Melbourne 1956

The ceremonies of the 1956 Games in Melbourne were again little more than the athletes' march and the reading of oaths. The only elements of overt national performance came in the form of a marching band playing the tune of 'Waltzing Matilda'. The song, written by A.B. 'Banjo' Paterson at the end of the 19th Century, tells a sentimental story of a swagman's tragic demise after stealing a sheep from a squatter (a wealthy landowner). Like many other Australian poems and songs of its time, it emerged out of a colonial folk tradition that paid no heed to Indigenous sovereignty or the illegitimacy of the white pastoral industry's use of the land. Instead, it sentimentalises the underprivileged as the white, working class battler and privileged squatters as legitimately owning the land on which their industry operates with both battling against an unfamiliar and unforgiving landscape. As Moreton-Robinson explains:

⁸ Because of the emphasis on amateur competition, for the next 30 years or so, the vast majority of competitors at Olympic Games would be white, wealthy and male. There was at least one notable exception: Duke Kahanamoku, reputedly descended from Hawaai'ian royalty, was a competitor and multiple Olympic champion in aquatic events in Antwerp, Amsterdam and Los Angeles.

The literature on colonial Britishness expressed through the bush battler, the pioneer, the explorer and the convict place these founding ancestors as struggling against the landscape. Thus, the landscape stands in as the oppressor in these narratives of victimisation and a displacement occurs; the violence committed against Indigenous people is disavowed. It is the landscape which must be conquered, claimed and named not Indigenous people, who, at the level of the subconscious are perceived to be part of the landscape and thus not human. By creating the landscape as oppressor, the values and virtues of achieving white possession can be valorised and Indigenous dispossession can be erased. (Moreton-Robinson, 2005)

The song was used again in the closing ceremony, but with a different set of words written by William Tainsh.⁹ It is here that the only overt acknowledgement of Indigenous culture or sovereignty is made in the ceremonies of this Olympic Games. This version of the song has a theme of farewelling visitors whilst encouraging them to return as tourist visitors at a later date:

Homeward, homeward, soon you will be going now
Momok wonargo ora go-yai, (*)
Joy of our meeting, pain of our parting,
Shine in our eyes as we bid you good-bye.

Good-bye, Olympians; good-bye, Olympians,
(On comes the evening, west goes the day.)
Roll up your swags and pack them full of memories,
Fair be the wind as you speed on your way.

Blessings attend you, Fortune befriend you,
All good go with you over the sea.
May the song of our fathers – “Will ye no’ come back again ?”
Sing in your hearts thro’ the years yet to be.

Come to Australia, back to Australia,
(Mist on the hills and the sun breaking through)
With the sliprails down and the billy boiling merrily,
Wide open arms will be waiting for you.

(*) Aboriginal words meaning "Farewell, brother. By and by come back."
(Organizing Committee of the XVI Olympiad, 1956)

The narrative voice of the song is that of White Australians, their Anglo-Celtic heritage confirmed through the reference to their Scottish ancestry: ‘May the song of

⁹ Tainsh was born in Scotland but emigrated to Melbourne where he became a well known figure through his composition of nostalgic poetry and regular radio broadcasts.

our fathers – “Will ye no’ come back again ?” It is assumed that this White Australian identity has the unambiguous right to farewell the international visitors (‘we bid you good-bye’) and to encourage their return, promising a warm welcome (‘Come to Australia, back to Australia/ ...Wide open arms will be waiting for you’). The fact that White Australians assume they can unproblematically adopt the role of farewellers from and welcomers to the land is clear and affirms the possessive logic of White Australian nationhood as common sense.

This is reinforced by the use of Indigenous language to repeat the message of farewell and welcomed return. This line is, however, clearly *not* uttered by an Indigenous voice, but rather is a White Australian appropriation of Indigenous language repeating the sentiment. Then (as now) very few White Australians would know any words or phrases in any Indigenous language, or even that there is more than one Indigenous language.¹⁰ This appropriation legitimates White belonging by constructing it as in touch with and even taking the place of Indigenous belonging.

Squaw Valley 1960

For the 1960 Squaw Valley winter games Walt Disney was appointed as head of pageantry. The description of the ceremonies in the Official Report of the Games shows that the President of the Organizing Committee, Prentice C. Hale, welcomed athletes and visitors (Organizing Committee of the VIII Olympic Winter Games, Squaw Valley, 1960). While the name of the location acknowledges originary Indigenous sovereignty, the lack of overt recognition of this in the Opening Ceremony positions it as assumed to be very much in the past.

¹⁰ The fact that the footnote makes reference only to ‘Aboriginal words’ seems to suggest that Tainsh was also under the misapprehension that there is only one Indigenous Australian language. For more information on Australian Indigenous Languages see Dixon, 2002.

Montreal 1976

The Montreal Summer Games ceremonies of 1976 were the first in which Indigenous culture featured prominently. Cost difficulties meant that the ceremonies were low-key. The innovation of having two people light the cauldron drew on the European founding cultures of Canada for its symbolism. The young woman, Sandra Henderson from Toronto, and the young man, Stephan Prefontaine of Montreal, were chosen, according to the official report, to ‘symbolize Canada’s two founding peoples’: France and Britain (Organizing Committee of the XXIst Olympiad, Montreal, 1976). Like Melbourne in 1956 the cultures from which the settler-invader national lineage is traced are explicitly those of the colonial centres of Western Europe, rather than those indigenous to the host nation.

The closing ceremony saw the first involvement of indigenous people in any Olympics ceremony. The official report described it thus:

The lights dim, and...the Olympic orchestra plays the *March of the Athletes*, a symbolic suite performed on traditional instruments augmented by Amerindian folk instruments such as tom-toms, rattles, and small bells. To the strains of this march, whose rhythms evoke the chants of the American Indians, a group of seventy-five Amerindians in full dress enter the stadium... . Moving in arrowhead formation, they escort the athletes of the Games of the XXI Olympiad. ... Then accompanied by 525 Amerindians in festive costumes, the athletes enter... .(Organizing Committee of the XXIst Olympiad, Montreal, 1976).

As Janice Forsyth points out, in reality only 200 of the performers were Indigenous and their numbers were augmented by around 250 non-Indigenous people ‘dressed and painted to look like Indians’ (Forsyth, 2002). She goes on to explain that the organisers could only afford to bus Indigenous participants in for one all-night rehearsal and that it was left to the local dancers to practice for the show. This

resulted in the irony that: ‘non-Aboriginal performers ... led the Aboriginal participants through their own commemoration’ (Forsyth, 2002). The official report goes on to describe the colours and effects of the costumes worn by the dancers, the erection of coloured wig-wams in the centre of the stadium and the crowning of athletes with headbands. The emphasis here is clearly on that which ‘looks’ Indigenous rather than people who actually are.¹¹ In the performance, the Indigenous people were not introduced and the four Indigenous leaders who accompanied the then President of the IOC, Lord Killanin, to the Royal Box were introduced only as ‘Amerindian Chiefs.’ In the report these men are named and their clothing described as ‘full tribal dress’ but their First Nation affiliations are not identified, therefore successfully avoiding any acknowledgement of their connection to the land on which the Olympic contest had just taken place.

Lake Placid 1980 and Los Angeles 1984

There was no reference to indigenous peoples or culture at either the opening or closing ceremonies of the 1980 Lake Placid Winter Games. The 1984 Los Angeles opening ceremony marked the beginning of a series of developments in terms of the use of Opening and Closing Ceremonies to tell explicitly national stories.

After a fanfare a single family, dressed in period pioneering costumes, enter the stadium.¹² They are followed by a series of covered wagons that roll out across the stadium. They build houses and barns that eventually form into towns. There is much

¹¹ To add insult to injury, the musical accompaniment of this segment was called ‘Danse Sauvage’ or ‘wild dance’. It was a specially commissioned work composed by the Canadian composer Andre Mathieu.

¹² Unless otherwise cited, all descriptions of events in opening and closing ceremonies are taken from my own observations of live and/or broadcast performances of the ceremonies or from videotaped recordings of them held in the archives of the Olympic Studies Centre Library, Lausanne, Switzerland.

celebration and dancing and flags are raised. A bell rings and the children go off to school. While there are no indigenous people to be seen, African American dancers and performers are mixed into this colonising group. Elsewhere in the ceremony there is considerable emphasis on African-American culture particularly in the next two 'historical' segments that celebrate the birth of jazz in New Orleans and the rise of gospel and soul music.¹³ In contrast, the absence of Indigenous peoples and culture is noticeable. Save for two lone figures in tribal dress amongst a 'mix' of 2000 residents of the city in a segment designed to celebrate international brotherhood, there is no explicit or implicit reference to indigeneity anywhere in the ceremony. Settler-invader national story telling necessitates celebrating the success of colonial conquest and glory in the pioneering spirit but such valorization of the colonial project is necessarily set against originary indigenous sovereignty that remains unacknowledged here. The challenge of how to reconcile these two ultimately incompatible stories of nation is something that opening ceremonies in settler-invader nations have grappled with ever since.

Calgary 1988

The capacity of organisers to control how indigenous people were to be presented and included (or not) in the Olympics first came under challenge from Indigenous peoples in the run up to the 1988 Winter Games in Calgary, Canada. Aware of the global attention that hosting the games brought, Indigenous groups used the Games for, as Forsyth and Wamsley put it, 'their own ideological purposes' (Forsyth and Wamsley, 2005). One group in particular, the Lubicon Lake Cree, called for a boycott of the

¹³ African American popular music artist Michael Jackson performed his hit song 'Beat It', the last two torch bearers were African Americans (including the granddaughter of Jessie Owens) and the athlete's oath was given by an African American athlete.

Games to draw attention to their land rights claim and their opposition to petroleum drilling on that land (Simpson, 1996). Their protest action also focussed on an exhibition organised by the Glenbow Museum of Calgary called *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples*. As Marjorie Halpin observed in her otherwise favourable review, the exhibition reflected the concept of 'Us collecting and defining Them' (Halpin, 1988). The fact that the exhibition was sponsored by Shell Canada Ltd who were undertaking the drilling against which the Lubicon were protesting was, for many Indigenous people, sharply ironic. Wamsley and Heine report Bernard Ominayak, the chief of the Lubicon Cree, as saying: the 'irony of using a display of North American Indian artifacts to attract people to the Winter Olympics being organized by interests who are still actively seeking to destroy Indian people seems painfully obvious' (Ominayak quoted in Wamsley & Heine, 1996b). In the official report of the Games, passing mention is made of the protest in a subsection of the 'Culture Division' section entitled 'Native Participation'. This section also outlines the objectives of a program designed to 'promote greater awareness and to create international exposure for Canada's Aboriginal people during the Games' (Organising Committee of the XVth Winter Games, Calgary, 1988). Here and elsewhere it is clear that the Games organisers had hoped to make more productive use of Indigeneity. This had begun at the bid in Baden Baden in 1981 when, according to Forsyth and Wamsley, 'the bid committee paraded a local chief and his wife [Lambert and Yvonne Fox], dressed in traditional clothing, in front of IOC members' (Forsyth and Wamsley, 2005). It was also evident elsewhere in the Games including in the medal design.¹⁴ While these can be read as attempts by the

¹⁴ Wamsley and Heine describe the medals as displaying: 'a ceremonial Indian headdress composed not of eagle feathers but of stylized representations of winter sporting

Organising Committee to show that indigeneity was being integrated into the games, many Indigenous people suspected that they were, as Wamsley and Heine put it, deliberate attempts to ‘distract attention from the Native resistance to the Games’ (Wamsley & Heine, 1996b). Elsewhere they suggest:

The outward ‘partnership’ displayed between the corporate Games and Native traditions ...served as grim reminders of the weak attempts by Canadians to conceal historical oppressive relations between cultures, a rather hideous past, and a tension-filled present’ (Wamsley and Heine, 1996a).¹⁵

As I will go on to show, this tension was especially obvious in the opening ceremony.

Early in the opening ceremony there is a dramatic announcement declaring:

In the spirit of the Olympic Winter Games please welcome our native Albertans: the tribes of Treaty 7 of 1877, a treaty still in effect and honored today.

Representatives of the five nations of Treaty 7 ride out on horseback waving to the assembled crowd as the names of their respective nations, the Blackfoot, the Peigan, the Blood, the Sarcee and the Stoney, are announced.¹⁶ Together they shout a single word of welcome and then ride off again while the announcer declares:

Ladies and gentlemen, the tribes of Treaty 7 salute and welcome you to the host city of Calgary in the great province of Alberta Canada to the 15th Olympic winter games.

While this represents an advance in its acknowledgement of Indigenous people and their connection to the land on which the Games is being held, there is uncertainty about what it means. In particular there is confusion about whose right and duty it is to welcome whom. First the visitors are asked to welcome the Indigenous people and

equipment: Downhill skis, ski poles, sleighs and toboggans protrude from a headband worn by an Indian chief depicted in stem profile’ (Wamsley and Heine, 1996a).

¹⁵ Throughout the opening ceremony various representations of indigenous culture were used, including drummers and a teepee-shaped frame inside which the Olympic cauldron sat but these, like in the closing ceremony of Montreal, value indigeneity as purely decorative.

¹⁶ The Lubicon Lake Cree were not signatories to Treaty 7.

in their single, unamplified word the Indigenous people then welcome the visitors. Throughout it remains clear whose is the narrative voice: again it is the 'Us' of White Canada defining 'Them'. Further, the tribes of Treaty 7 are constructed as possessions of the colonial culture: they are 'our Native Albertans'. Throughout the discourse of the possessive logic of colonialism is clearly at work.

This was immediately followed by a performance of colonization and immigration, which closely resembled that in Los Angeles. The announcer declares:

For over 200 years Alberta has welcomed people from every continent in this world so let us recall with them their noble legacy. Ladies and gentlemen the people of Alberta.

Here the acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty is offset by a valorization of colonial conquest. Similarly, the 'native Albertans' of the first sequence are explicitly excluded from the group of so-called 'people of Alberta' costumed in colonial finery, again establishing a clear demarcation between 'Us' and 'Them'. The 'people of Alberta' then perform folk dances and join together in the singing of a song with the lyrics:

We are just one,
We are bound together on this planet of the sun.
One world to share,
We're intertwined one heart one mind that's everywhere,
And like a tree so smart and tall,
We are like branches of one life one spirit.
We're all together in one world for we are you.

This celebration of multicultural society emphasizes unity in diversity. The management of this inherently contradictory notion is something that colonizing national stories struggle to contain. As Ghassan Hage explains, the white national story is 'structured around a white culture, where Aboriginal people and non-White 'ethnics' are merely national objects to be moved or removed according to the white

national will' (Hage, 1998). Further, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson points out: 'regardless of whether multiculturalism is perceived as a threat or a promise, ...the nation must first be believed to be a white possession' (Moreton-Robinson, 2005). Such celebratory discourses of unity in diversity expose anxieties about the threats that indigenous and migrant cultures pose to the dominance and control that white people have over the white national story.

Atlanta 1996

The pioneering story was told again at the 1996 Atlanta Summer Games, this time with enormous puppets representing early settlers and slave owners.¹⁷ Like Los Angeles, the emphasis in this ceremony was on African-American culture, with a segment dedicated to Martin Luther King and the South's involvement in the civil-rights struggles of the mid-to-late 20th Century. Again there was no mention or acknowledgement of originary Indigenous sovereignty or of Indigenous culture at all until the Antwerp ceremony at the closing ceremony when the flag was passed to the

¹⁷ The use of giant puppets at the Atlanta Games was almost certainly inspired by the enormous puppets of tall-ships that had been used in the opening ceremony of the previous games held in Barcelona in 1992. It is useful, however, to consider how giant puppets were also becoming increasingly important in other social and political spheres at this time. David Graeber, for instance, makes a powerful argument for the important role that giant puppets have played in the 'symbolic warfare' of direct action anti-globalization protests since the 1960s. There are other strong similarities between the carnivalesque aspects of these protest actions (which are, as he puts it, 'replete with clowns, stilt-walkers, jugglers, fire-breathers, unicyclists, Radical Cheerleaders, costumed kick-lines, or, often, entire marching bands' (p.384)) and the mise-en-scene of Olympics ceremonies (the Sydney 2000 Opening Ceremony alone featured almost all of those elements). It is clear that both Olympic Ceremonies and globalization protests are drawing on the same 'base-line reference' of 'the late Medieval world' (p. 396) and, as Graeber argues, can both be read, through Bakhtin, as offering 'tacit attacks on the very principle of hierarchy' (p. 396). It is interesting to consider, then, the possibility that the Rabelaisian 'din' which characterizes most Olympic Games Ceremonies since the 1980s in itself challenges the hierarchical principles on which the national stories they are telling rest.

Organising Committee for the Sydney 2000 games.¹⁸ The emphasis on the ‘race’ politics of civil rights rather than Indigenous culture and sovereignty is significant and indicates the comparatively low level of attention that Indigenous peoples and their activism then attracted in the United States.

Sydney 2000

Like Calgary, Sydney’s games had also been dogged by threats of Indigenous boycott.¹⁹ The organizing committee had also made significant inclusion of Indigenous culture at the bid in Monte Carlo in 1993, had incorporated Indigenous iconography into the Games logo and had dedicated an entire Olympic Arts Festival, ‘The Festival of the Dreaming’, to contemporary Indigenous Arts and Culture.²⁰ Sydney also saw the most overt inclusion of Indigenous culture and involvement in an Opening Ceremony. This inclusion, however, had its limits. The welcome was *not* performed by representatives of Indigenous nations but by representatives of the agricultural and pastoral industries riding stock horses. They entered the stadium

¹⁸ The emphasis on Australian Indigenous culture in the Antwerp ceremony stood in marked contrast to this absence. Infamous in Australian popular memory for the inflatable kangaroos carried on the backs of BMX bike riders, what is less well remembered is that these kangaroos were decorated with dot paintings, connoting Indigenous culture. Also included in the ceremony were several indigenous performing artists including Christine Anu and Mandawuy Yunupingu. For a more detailed analysis of this moment in the Atlanta closing ceremony, see Godwell, 2000.

¹⁹ Brett Neilson argues that the protest activities that were planned ‘were indeed unAustralian, not in the sense that they contravened mythical qualities such as mateship or the fair-go but because they involved performances of citizenship that exceeded the constitutional frame of the Australian nation-state’ (Neilson, 2002). See also Elder, Pratt and Ellis 2006.

²⁰ George Morgan read this use of Indigenous iconography as ‘ideological balm to troubled consciences’ (Morgan, 2003). Lisa Meekison in her analysis of the Festival of the Dreaming argued that ‘Whatever SOCOG might have wanted from it, [the Indigenous directors and] performers made it their own and used it to talk about indigenous history and relationship to place, and to present both the diversity and unity of indigenous cultures (Meekison, 2000). See also Godwell, 2000.

riding over an enormous, painted, canvas groundsheet that represented a huge, empty, featureless expanse: arguably the largest representation of *terra nullius* ever produced.

In the hour-long warm up event, a welcome to country was sung by Indigenous Opera soprano Deborah Cheetham, but neither this segment or Cheetham's name were given credit in the official programme, suggesting it was a late inclusion in the event. The stockmen and women's entrance was accompanied by the soundtrack music from the Australian feature film *The Man From Snowy River*, itself an adaptation of the bush ballad of the same name, written by A.B. 'Banjo' Paterson who also composed the song 'Waltzing Matilda' which had featured at the Melbourne Games nearly half a century earlier. The fact that both ceremonies featured his work at moments of welcome/farewell is significant and indicates how little distance the dominant understanding of who has the right and responsibility to perform such duties had shifted: clearly in 2000 it still rested firmly in the hands of White Australia just as it had in 1956 and it still clearly relied on an invocation of a nostalgic remembering of colonial settlement of the early 19th Century that Paterson's poetry achieved. In this opening sequence we once again see the 'values and virtues of achieving white possession' valorised (Moreton-Robinson, 2005).

The national story opened with a little white girl in a pink dress ('hero girl'). After spreading out her beach towel and applying her sunscreen she falls asleep. In the sequence, entitled 'Deep Sea Dreaming' she performs an acrobatic aerial aquatic dream, but the use of the word 'dreaming' in the title brings other connotations, specifically with indigenous culture and peoples. This can only be read as an elision of white-Australian notions of dreaming (both something that happens when we sleep and aspirational thinking) with Aboriginal-Australian notions of dreaming (an

important and integral part of Indigenous legal and belief systems). On her descent back to earth, hero girl finds herself amidst a group of indigenous children who usher her forward to meet an adult indigenous performer, the dancer Djakapurra Muryarryun. Individually and together these two figures circulate around the rest of the ceremony providing continuity to the various segments.

Next, people from various Indigenous nations join together in dance and song to form a tableau that eventually converges into smoking ceremonies and culminates in a Wondjina being raised into the stadium. The sequence offered a performance of originary sovereignty, familiar at 'welcome to country' ceremonies, which was not positioned as performing any kind of welcoming act. In other words, Indigenous people were valued for performing their sovereignty without having any real power to enact it.

From here, the story of nation segued into a celebration of the diversity and beauty of the natural environment. In this segue, for the first time in any Olympic Games Ceremony, the moment of invasion was performed. This came in the form of a large bicycle contraption in the shape of a tall ship, pedaled by a 'crew' in the period costume of 18th Century naval officers and sailors. The 'ship' moves onto the stadium and then pauses long enough for the 'captain' to pull out his telescope and peer around the stadium. At the same time, Muryarryun moves past, holding a spear in a threatening or perhaps defensive pose. The Captain and the dancer eye each other for a moment and then move away from each other. It is unclear whether the ship represents Cook's Endeavour or Phillip's First Fleet, but either way the implication is clear: this is the arrival of European people and the start of colonial settlement. While it is a breakthrough to represent the moment of invasion, the fact that it was presented

in such a whimsical way, and that the 'point of contact' is so explicitly non-violent (save for the arming of Muyarryun with an aggressive or defensive spear) only reinforces the myth of peaceful settlement which prevails in dominant stories of white Australian history.

The next sequence of interest once again told a story of pioneers. Performers wearing period, rural clothing enter the stadium, set up houses and form towns. The final segment celebrates the arrival of immigrant cultures from around the world accompanied by a song sung by hero girl. The lyric of this song sends a strikingly similar message to that performed by the pioneering settlers in Calgary:

There's a peace in our hearts and a hope in our hands,
We're the family of children; we come from many different lands.
Our time is just beginning; our race is yet to run,
But if you will take us with you, then we have already won.

Under the southern skies,
Together in this land,
Every voice in celebration,
A family hand in hand!
Under the southern skies,
As one we rise,
And turn our eyes to see
All the wonder of the future
In a world of harmony.

There's a great spirit rising from the desert to the sea.
As it sweeps across this southern land it calls to you and me:
We're the dreamers and the dreaming; we're the face of things yet to come.
Every child can be a hero if our world can live as one.

Here again we have the elision of a White Australian and an Indigenous Australian understanding of dreaming, but the overarching message of 'unity in diversity' is what emerges most prominently from this song.

In the closing ceremony three of Australia's best know bands, Midnight Oil, Yothu Yindi and Savage Garden, challenged this feel-good message. The lead singer

of Savage Garden, Darren Hayes performs their song 'Affirmation' wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with the Australian Aboriginal flag. Yothu Yindi, a band made up of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous musicians, play their song 'Treaty', the lyrics of which makes an unmistakable statement about the originary and continuing sovereignty of Indigenous people and the fact that it has never been ceded. As the song's title suggests, its refrain makes a repeated and overt demand for a treaty to be signed between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of Australia. Midnight Oil perform their hit song 'Beds are Burning' which also recognises Indigenous sovereignty while explicitly calling for both reparation and repossession. To underscore their message, they wear clothing on which the word 'sorry' is written, thereby protesting against the conservative Howard government's refusal to apologise to Indigenous people on behalf of the nation for the removal of Indigenous children from their families. The message that emerged clearly was that the story of 'unity in diversity' that had been projected at the opening ceremony was not as authoritative as the Organisers would have us believe.

Salt Lake City 2002

The Salt Lake City winter games in 2002 was the first time that the peoples and cultures of indigenous nations were given prominence in an Olympic ceremony hosted by the USA. This ceremony has a single white hero child, this time a boy, who wanders onto the ice and meets representatives of the five Indigenous nations (introduced by name) whose lands fall in the state of Utah: the Ute, Shoshone, Goshute, Paiute and Navajo. Representatives from each offer traditional welcomes to athletes from Denmark, Canada, Japan, Italy and, importantly, the USA. This is the first time in any Olympic opening ceremony hosted by a settler-invader nation that

Indigenous peoples were given the unambiguous right and responsibility of welcoming visitors to their land. The fact that athletes from the host nation were *also* welcomed made it clear that Indigenous sovereignty can and does co-exist with national sovereignty.

These five representatives are joined by groups of indigenous peoples, some in traditional/ceremonial costume and some wearing fleeces and jeans, playing instruments and singing songs in language. They join with Robbie Robertson in the singing of a song he co wrote with Jim Wilson and the Six Nation Women Singers called 'Stomp Dance (Unity)':

In circles we gather
Moonlight fires are kindled
Sending it back
We just make it go back
Beating hearts, beating hearts
Come as one, come as one
This is Indian country
This is Indian country

Together we dance
All the first nations
There's no chance
We ever going to give up
Beating hearts, beating hearts
Come as one, come as one
This is Indian country
This is Indian country

Going home, going home
To a nation, six nations
To all the faces I did not know did not know
Beating hearts, beating hearts
Come as one, come as one
This is Indian country
This is Indian country

In this song there is explicit recognition of original indigenous sovereignty in the repetition of the unambiguous statement: 'This is Indian country'. Robbie Robertson then introduces the members of his band that is made up of Indigenous and non-

Indigenous musicians and says: 'we would like to pay respect to the five nations of Utah. Thank you for your blessing and warm welcome'. In this moment Robertson (himself of Indigenous heritage) makes it clear that Indigenous peoples are doing the welcoming and even citizens of the United States should expect to require a welcome onto this land.

There followed next, once again, the story of colonial conquest and pioneering. The voice over says:

They continued westward ever westward to a land whose heights and depths and plains sailed beyond human imagination. In waves they came. By the thousands. Spanish missionaries. English and Canadian trappers. Mexicans, Chinese, German and Irish migrants and Mormon pioneers.

These people, dressed in period costume, are accompanied by covered wagons. As they are unloaded, the people sing the American folk song 'Hard Times Come Again No More':

Let us pause in life's pleasures and count its many tears,
While we all sup sorrow with the poor;
There's a song that will linger forever in our ears;
Oh Hard times come again no more.

Tis the song, the sigh of the weary,
Hard Times, hard times, come again no more
Many days you have lingered around my cabin door;
Oh hard times come again no more.

This song is by no means triumphant and clearly constructs the process of conquering and claiming the land as one of hardship and sorrow but which once again performs the displacement evident in *Waltzing Matilda*.

Vancouver 2010

The most recent Games under consideration was the 2010 winter games in Vancouver. Here for the first time in Olympic history, the host nation was joined by

four host First Nations: the Squamish Nation, the Musqueam Indian Band, the Lil'wat First Nation, and the Tsleil-Waututh First Nation. Chiefs of these four host First Nations, Bill Williams, Ernie Campbell, Leonard Andrew and Justin George (respectively), were treated as heads of state and were seated behind the Canadian Governor General, Michaëlle Jean and Prime Minister, Stephen Harper. In the ceremony, people of these host First Nations perform protocols to welcome other indigenous people (other First Nations, Inuit and Metis) to the stadium accompanied by totem poles that emerge out of the stadium floor.²¹ The Indigenous people together welcome visiting athletes on behalf of all Canadians. This once again shows how Indigenous sovereignty can and does co-exist with Canadian sovereignty and was a far cry from the Calgary Games some thirty years earlier where a possessive logic had constructed Indigenous people as a 'them' to white Canada's 'us'.

As we have now grown to expect, a cultural section that told a story beginning with pioneering colonial settlement followed. As with the Sydney ceremony, this section presents the encounter between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, but again in a way that emphasizes non-violence. This sequence, beginning with a short narration by Donald Sutherland, is clearly meant to represent those who had

²¹ Interestingly, during the Indigenous welcome sequence of the Vancouver Opening Ceremony the commentator on the BBC coverage said: 'We are not trespassing but welcome visitors'. This comment exposes an emergent anxiety about the possessive logic. Within this possessive logic, the possibility of being a trespasser is never entertained simply because the originary sovereignty of Indigenous peoples is never acknowledged. Now that these moments of national storytelling are not only acknowledging but also allowing Indigenous peoples' right to enact their sovereignty (to welcome people to their land for instance) the possibility of being a trespasser is beginning to emerge as a distinct, and thereby worrying, logical consequence of it. In other words, within a colonial possessive logic, it is simply unthinkable for colonial settlers to understand themselves as trespassers or as trespassing, but now the reality that, for hundreds of years these colonial invaders have been doing precisely that is becoming clear because of the performance and subsequent acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereign rights.

come to Canada to look for a home and a refuge. Pioneers enter the arena in groups and couples led by a single figure dressed in, as one Indigenous blogger put it, 'roughly 'arctic' regalia' (Adrienne K., 2010). This single figure, who is clearly meant to represent Indigenous people, bangs his staff on the ground sending ripples of 'electricity' radiating out across the stadium. To guide the way of these wandering pioneers, Indigenous symbols of a wolf, eagle, bear and buffalo representing the compass directions light up as constellations in the sky. Again, the encounter is explicitly represented as non-violent to the extent that it almost encourages a reading whereby Indigenous people welcome settlers and offer them guidance and refuge.

Conclusion

Reading these ceremonies collectively, we can see the shifts that have occurred in the performance of welcome, the representation of originary indigenous sovereignty and the story of pioneering settlement.²² What emerges is a pattern whereby the story of pioneering settlement is told with remarkable uniformity enacting the possessive logic on which the 'British imperial project was predicated' (Moreton-Robinson, 2005). The only perceptible shift in these stories is that they become markedly less celebratory and more somber and contemplative in the more recent ceremonies of Salt-Lake City and Vancouver. Originary Indigenous sovereignty remained

²² In reading these ceremonies, however, it is important to remember that Olympic ceremonies give host nations a unique opportunity to tell their national story to an international audience. So the choices that are made in this retelling demonstrate something of the importance and significance placed on certain aspects of those stories. As Forsyth and Wamsley argue, the choices that are made about the representation of Indigenous people, their culture and sovereignty tell us more about the organisers and boosters than it does about the Indigenous people themselves: 'All things considered, the ceremonies are epic tales that professional, business and civic elites weave about themselves and their place in society' (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2005). They go on to argue that the fact that these displays are designed to appeal to the mass population who watch them, and that they generally succeed in doing so, 'speaks to the fact that the narratives constructed by Olympic organisers fit a narrow conception of social reality and their place within it' (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2005).

unacknowledged until 1976 in Montreal but even here it was included in the closing ceremony as decorative and not substantive. By the time of the Sydney ceremony it had become unthinkable to *not* include some kind of acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty but it was not until the Salt-Lake City and Vancouver Games that Indigenous people were able to enact their sovereignty by welcoming visiting athletes, officials and spectators to their land. If we compare this to the earlier games in Los Angeles (1932) and Melbourne where the role was clearly understood to belong to the white colonisers of the land, we can see a significant shift in the 'common sense' of the possessive logic. This tells something significant about the impact that Indigenous activism has had over the last century or so and augurs well for further change in the future.

These ceremonies remind us that the representation of colonial conquest and pioneering as a glorious, brave and wholesome endeavour is relatively easy to perform and to celebrate in settler-invader national stories. However, telling the story of originary indigenous sovereignty does not come quite so easily or obviously within a settler-invader storytelling framework; its integration into the national stories of colonized nations has been haphazard, limited and derivative. The unevenness of the acknowledgement of originary indigenous sovereignty and the capacity for Indigenous people to perform and demonstrate their sovereign rights, laws and customs has been proscribed by the dominant white national stories which the ceremonies ultimately perform. While in several instances Indigenous people have been given the opportunity to welcome visitors and participants to the games and to their land, the opportunity for them to choose *not* to welcome them has never been made available.

What is of most interest in these ceremonies is that which is missing altogether: the act of dispossession and the horror of its violence. The moment of interconnection between the indigenous owners of the land and the colonizing invaders has been directly represented only twice in any Olympic ceremony. In both instances the representations were so fleeting, whimsical and ambiguous as to be completely overshadowed by the overdetermined, Rabelaisian spectacle of the ceremony around them. This has the effect of both denying and disavowing the real violence of the historical moment. David Graeber makes the powerful point that while we can understand and appreciate that 'nations' are indeed imagined entities, at the same time 'nation-states are real because they can kill you' (p.406); a fact that Indigenous peoples around the world know only too well. Of course, it is perfectly logical to argue that an Olympics opening ceremony is no place to perform such violence but that is, I argue, precisely the point. This absence, or elision, corresponds precisely with the possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty. In some of these ceremonies the sovereignty of the indigenous other is neither denied nor refused but in all of them the power of this sovereignty is limited and derivative. So, while the eyes of the world are focussed on the host nation, it can tell a story of the nation which, as Moreton-Robinson describes it, exalts in a 'sense of tolerance and fair play' (such as unity in diversity) but, through the limited derivative space it makes available for the Indigenous other, it limits and controls the threat which originary indigenous sovereignty necessarily poses for the dominant national story (Moreton-Robinson, 2005). So in their very recognition and inclusion of originary indigenous sovereignty, these ceremonies actually simultaneously refuse and deny it and, as such rehearse and thereby reinforce the 'common sense knowledge' of white ownership of the nation.

The common sense logic is that these ceremonies (being necessarily positive and celebratory) are not places where the story of the violence and horror of Indigenous dispossession can be told. Again, that is exactly the point. The act of dispossession cannot be told because the possessive logic, which is at the heart of the national story, does not allow it *to be* told. Exposing the elision and understanding the logic that informs it and allows it to make sense is vital if white people (we) are to divest them(our)selves of the power and privilege they (we) derive as a direct product of it.

This raises the question of what it would take for an Olympic Ceremony that allows these shameful, violent aspects of settler-invader national story telling to happen? The answer is simple: the attitudes and responsibilities central to liturgical discourses of reconciliation (empathy, apology, remorse, contrition and reparation alongside forgiveness and the overcoming of enmity) would need to prevail. For this to be available for ceremonial performance on an international stage as prominent as the Opening Ceremony of an Olympic Games would, of course, require that the emotional and practical work of dismantling the possessive logic at the core of all settler-invader national stories to have been done. Arguably, the Ceremonies themselves have been, and may continue to be, instrumental in bringing about the change required to achieve this. Indigenous peoples in Canada, the USA and Australia have seen their cultures and national stories represented in increasingly more important and, ultimately, powerful roles on one of the most prominent international stages available. In doing so, they have been able to experience a concomitant pride and agency in their own national stories and also in those stories' capacity to co-exist with and ultimately disrupt settler-invader national stories. As we have seen, these dominant settler-invader national stories have increasingly conceded the truth of

originary Indigenous sovereignty and this in itself may have garnered increased confidence and therefore capacity amongst Indigenous people to demand and ultimately realise important political objectives, such as a formal recognition of their originary sovereignty, self-determination, official apology and reparation.

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