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WHAT THE BLOODY HELL IS A *TOURISTIC TERRA NULLIUS*?

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ABSTRACT:

This paper suggest that tourist attractions might act as powerful agents in forming and forging people's understanding of national identity. Attractions are often presented in a simplistic manner as objects without further complexity, this understanding hide the fact that images presented to the public might work as social tableaux. An analysis of how attractions are constructed in the social realm by texts surrounding them is here done by highlighting the racial/ethnic context of them. The suggestion that attractions can be understood as narratives in themselves leads the paper to deconstruct the way attractions currently maintain a colonial discourse. A case is presented in this paper, involving a bushranger called Thunderbolt that Uralla, a small town in the New England area of NSW, uses as its main attraction. The paper suggests that a *touristic terra nullius* is created by the focus on what exists as objects in the present, without a regard for what has existed in the past. The discussion shows how a narrative analysis of tourist attractions can lead researchers to discover a palimpsest of a location's history, still visible through the modern texts about it.

Keywords: Australia; national identity; touristic terra nullius; narrative analysis

INTRODUCTION

This article is an extract from a larger doctoral thesis, and thus part of a larger argument. This section's aim is to present an alternative reading of a tourist attraction in order for current and future tourist managers to appreciate the range of possible interpretations available for the attractions they market and manage. It discusses initially the context in which the research is set. Grounding the research in cultural studies, the paper shortly presents the concepts of nation and national identity. Whilst the different field of studies might be seen as a limitation for this paper – no mention is, for example, made of tourist motivation or marketing literature – it is here suggested that the study should be read as a critical attempt to introduce some new concepts that might enrich tourism studies.

This is followed by a discussion of the structure of tourist attractions, and how these can be re-defined as narratives. The unapologetic subjectivity of this research is also based on the same premises of the field it comes from, the researcher will, for example, use first person tense in the paper. One reading of texts available for tourists is presented, but an acknowledgement is made that multiple readings are possible from a polysemic viewpoint. Polysemy is the intentional opening up of meaning in a text; it aims at highlighting the multitude of different interpretations that any text can contain, depending on the reader's point of view (Barker, 2000).

The discussion will show some examples from tourist texts to highlight what tourists consume whilst on holiday, and how these texts 'construct' attractions as narrative entities. It will here be highlighted how a focus on specific attraction features disregard marginalised groups in society and can even be read as conservative attempts to maintain a status quo in a hegemonic society. It is by 'writing out' the Indigenous population from tourist texts, and by referring to history as

something that has only occurred during colonial rule of the country, that a *touristic terra nullius* is created. The racial critique here presented is, however, only one dimension of the texts surrounding the attraction.

Rather than accepting that specific places have inherently correct meanings, Shields (1991) questioned the way certain regions and popular tourist destinations were each given a specific meaning in public discourse. By deconstructing the texts surrounding his case studies he presented how specific myths about places had formed the image people held about those locations. It is by extending that research that I aim to question how attractions are given meaning based on the texts surrounding them, and thereafter show that underlying 'meta-narratives' forge an understanding of the place. This case is written as an example for tourist authorities to follow when critically examining texts describing their chosen attractions. Seemingly neutral attractions might carry an unintended bias that becomes evident when the narrative structure of the attraction is disseminated.

Context: The nation – or should it be called *imagi-nation*?

The concept of national identity and its relationship to tourism is complex. Nation, nationality, and nationalism are all highly controversial matters filled with emotions, whilst assumed to be natural elements of society. A nation is, to borrow Barthes' terminology, a myth (1957, 1972) – that is, an understanding of a specific area used in everyday conversations. The myth contains connotations that naturalise a specific understanding to the extent that it is regarded as a reified thing. This was a matter Barthes illustrated by semiotically deconstructing the mythical messages of pictures in newspapers, for example, showing how the drinking of milk can be regarded as an 'un-French' act in contrast to drinking wine (Barthes, 1957, 1972, p. 60).

Benedict Anderson (1991) traced the emergence of nations, in the way we understand them today, to the development of print technology and capitalism. He explained that certain groups of people always have felt solidarity with one another owing to some necessity – such as their being hunters and gatherers or farmers in the same region – but the feeling of solidarity with a larger group that essentially does not share anything except for its extended habitus is a construct of the imagination. Emblems – such as a common language, flags, costumes, folk dances – all share the 'capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect *particular solidarities*' (Anderson, 1991, p.113-133, italics in the original).

If it is accepted that a nation is an imagined community, it then follows that both nationalism and national identity are equally constructed concepts – or as Bhabha argues, narratives (1990). My suggestion is that tourist attractions essentially can be seen as 'miniature narratives' of nations – what are selected and emphasised in attractions is what in larger terms constitutes the narrative of the nation.

Several Australian tourist attractions are based on history and heritage – built or natural – of the region where they are located. If economic success is the purpose of the place's existence as an attraction, it can be assumed that the image/product served to tourists is the one that market research has claimed that tourists want to consume (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998). The nationalist agenda of over-emphasising the uniqueness of a particular territory and history (Anderson, 1991) can be compared with tourist promoters' agendas of doing exactly the same. It could even be argued that it is the same agendas that are in question (Rowe, 1993, p. 260). The ultimate purpose of tourism is leisure and enjoyment; the intentional down-playing of 'unpleasant' factors is thus a part of accepted tourist management strategies (Chang & Holt, 1991, p. 102).

But if tourism were to be viewed from a more holistic perspective – still having as an ultimate purpose to provide leisure and enjoyment, but equally politically and socially significant in its power to educate travellers about social inequalities – new ways of presenting, interpreting, and

experiencing attractions and destinations are needed (Edelheim, 2007b). Equally, if non-stereotypical depictions were to be utilised in tourism, new ways of thinking would be opened up – not just in terms of race relations as presented in this paper, but also, and equally importantly, about sustainable cultural and ecological environments, as well as age and gender relations to name some.

Aspects of a narrated Australian national identity

Turner (1993) explains that popular works of fiction in Australian society, such as books and films, often feature male protagonists who are rebellious against the system but ultimately unsuccessful in their attempts to break free from their context. He claims that this is a political attempt ‘to naturalise an ideological view of the power relations between self and society which proposes the futility of individual action against the status quo’ (Turner, 1993, p. 84). Turner’s message is that Australian narratives simultaneously enforce individualism and power dominance from above. They are essentially functioning for uncritical readers as a social tableau that overtly seems to encourage criticism but covertly reinforces the ultimate futility of resistance against decisions made by leaders, managers, or other people with some sort of authority.

Tourism and leisure pursuits can be connected to the construction of an Australian national identity in similar ways to Turner’s literary and cinema narratives. The stereotypical way of spending family holidays, popular since the 1950s – travelling by car and camping out – is still strong, even though the more competitive airline industry has to some extent changed the mode of transport from road to air. The major holiday season, starting at Christmas, and ending by the Australia Day holiday at the end of January, always results in a tremendous rise in private automobile usage on the national highways. The family, as an extended individual, is expected to make journeys in the country and to visit certain attractions that collectively communicate aspects of their own identity to visitors (McLean & Cooke, 2003).

Heritage attractions are one of these sources of identity. Hetherington explains that the romantic structure of social relations in the past, ‘more authentic, expressive and fulfilling’, has led people to establish identities based on perceptions of the past (1998, p. 101). A danger with the preservation of a certain past is that conservation has very strong links with conservatism (Lanfant, 1995, p. 17). This results, in the Australian context, in an image of the national identity being equal to the Pioneer Myth (Rowe, 1993) – strong, independent, white, heterosexual men – essentially an uncompromising picture with implications for current day family values, the work market, and society at large.

The pioneer myth has its roots in the national romantic literature of the late eighteen-hundreds and early nineteen-hundreds, in which white men working in primary industries were pioneering and settling the land (Schlunke, 2005). The pioneer myth is very much a construct from the times when the infamous ‘White Australia Policy’ was written, but has lived on in the fantasy of the urbanised population, and is still a potent political tool in the nation (Gunew, 1990; Howard, 2005).

METHODS

Outline for how narrative analysis will be used in this paper

Text is used in this article with a broad definition: text can be seen as ‘anything that generates meaning through signifying practices’ (Barker, 2000, p. 393). It is common in Cultural Studies to talk about text as an analytical entity that contains different media; *Text*, *reading* and *writing* are therefore used as combining concepts in this article when analysing the production and interpretation of the material studied.

Bal (1997), divides narratives into three parts: *the text, the story, and the fabula*. The first part – *texts* – comprise the only tangible elements of narratives that readers come across, such as written texts, pictures, movies, sounds, structures or other entities that present themselves to the world in a manner that gives the reader specific information. The two other parts are abstract constructs that only become evident through an analysis: The versions offered in the different *stories*, can be regarded as aspects of the texts. The stories are finally suggesting different *fabulae*, depending on what texts had been used in the analysis. In Bal's words: 'It is by way of the text that the reader has access to the story, of which the fabula is, so to speak, a *memorial trace that remains with the reader after completion of the reading*' (1997, p. xv, emphasis added).

An author who has combined narratives and the understanding of place is Entrikin, who refers to Ricoeur's discussion of the significance of plots in narratives as they draw together separate entities into comprehensible wholes. The suggestion Entrikin builds on here is to treat texts surrounding places similarly to the way Ricoeur treats written texts, where the different attributes of place are 'emplotted' onto an understandable whole (1991, p. 25). The difference from a positivist description of attraction is that none of these emplotted places claims preference; each is an acceptable version in its own right.

One of the goals ... is to interpret the meaning of places. The geographer becomes a translator, translating the story of places in such a way that the subjective and objective realities that compose our understanding of place remain interconnected. The geographer as narrator translates his or her stories into a new form and, with interests somewhat different from those of the participant in a place or region, abstracts from the experience of a group (Entrikin, 1991, p. 58).

This is one of the points I will bring into the study of tourist attractions in this paper: an interpretation of the meaning of the attraction. By incorporating Entrikin's notion of the narrative structure of place and Bal's terminology on tourist attractions, it will be easier to see the different texts that refer to a joint story, and that combine to form a fabula which acts as the memory of the narrative.

A poststructural tourist attraction system

Leiper, (1995) in an attempt to analyse tourist attractions as scientific entities, developed a structuralist model based on MacCannell's (1976) semiotic framework for destination sightseeing. It is evident, when reading Leiper's arguments leading up to this model, that he was frustrated with definitions of attractions that too simplistically concentrated on just the attraction, with assumptions about the 'magnetism' of attractions, that 'pull' travellers to them. Leiper regarded these ideas as nonsensical statements that considered attractions to be 'metaphysical mysteries', and highlighted the need to view attractions from an informed scientific viewpoint. In the model, he suggested that attractions have to contain three necessary elements: '*a tourist or a human element, a nucleus or a central element, and a marker or informative element*' (1995, p. 141 - 143, emphasis in original). Leiper specified that the nucleus can be an object, but does not have to be one; it can rather be a place, a precinct, an event, or even an atmosphere. '[A]ttractions can *occur* almost anywhere' he suggested (1995, p. 145, emphasis added).

Richards (2002) points out two weaknesses with Leiper's attraction system. Firstly, the structural approach emphasises the set 'reality' of each element in the system. Richards builds on Urry (1990) in an attempt to explain how a marker can be expected to contribute to the dominant view of an attraction. Richards however adds to this MacCannell's criticism of Urry arguing that tourists 'can penetrate, change, and develop the attraction system' (2001, p. 31) and thus create an experience that is an alternative to the dominant gaze. The second weakness,

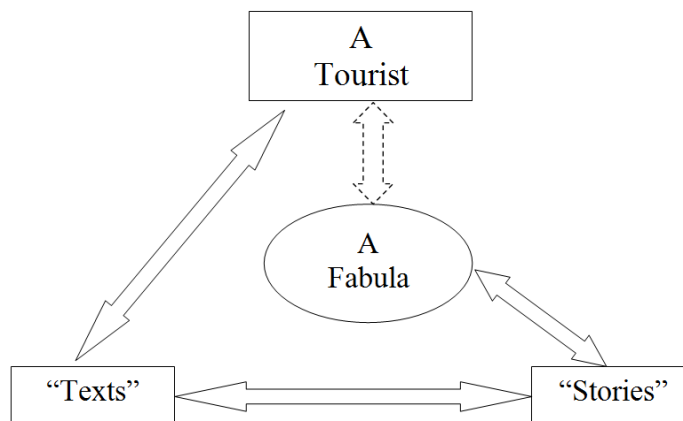
according to Richards, is that Leiper's system disregards the meanings that tourists attach to attractions.

A way of using Leiper's attraction system principles, but overcoming the weaknesses pointed out by Richards, is to view the system from a poststructural narrative perspective – in which the attraction is seen as a narrative. The elements from Leiper's system – the tourist, the marker, and the nucleus – would be adapted by adding one more element. Rather than assuming that the markers and the nucleus are objective 'realities' that mean the same to everybody, they would be investigated as subjective clues that each make up the final picture. Pritchard and Morgan (2000, p. 899) claim that '[s]pace and place are complex concepts. They are cultural constructions subject to change and negotiation'. This approach follows Rojek's suggestion of viewing attractions as social constructions linked to what he calls 'collage tourism' where representations and fabrications are part of the constant *indexing* and *dragging* that form the postmodern media society of which tourism is a part (1997).

Rojek highlights the detail that fiction, as much as facts, has an impact on how attractions are perceived: neither should be seen as more important than the other. This notion is important for the redefinition of attractions as narratives: a description of an attraction is not only an attempt at a factual analysis, but is equally a part of a larger combination of texts that together form the attraction as an abstract concept in the reader's mind.

In order to investigate these fluid entities the vocabulary of narrative analysis will therefore substitute Leiper's 'marker' and 'nucleus', and *an attraction would thus be defined as being constituted by a tourist, texts, stories, and a fabula*. Note that the first and last element of the definition are in singular form, while the two middle elements – text and story that replace Leiper's (1995) 'marker' – are in plural form. This is to point out that each tourist constructs an individual fabula from a range of different information sources.

Figure 1: Tourist attractions as narratives



In order to understand how a tourist attraction fabula is constructed, it is necessary to assemble the pieces of text that can form the impression of 'a' fabula. While it is true that a range of different fabulae can be assembled depending on the parts included, each one is reality to the individual who assembled that fabula. When I now take on the task of assembling tourist attractions as narratives I am fully aware of the fact that 'my' fabula is only one possibility amongst countless others. I am also aware of the fact that 'my' fabula is not static; when somebody tells me about a feature that I did not know about before, essentially introducing a new *text*, that feature will again alter my understanding of the attraction and 'my' fabula.

I therefore suggest that *tourist attractions as narratives* can be understood as *theoretical snapshots* at a specific time and, just like other snapshots, inform their audience about a feature at a certain moment. The reason I call them theoretical snapshots is that attractions are not one-dimensional like photographs, but rather multidimensional, incorporating all texts that the tourist has perceived up until that stage. However, what makes the analogy to a snapshot valuable is that it encapsulates possible biases, explains why a certain focus highlights specific features, and emphasise features that stakeholders close to the attraction might not be aware of as they might have a more static understanding of the attraction.

My suggestion is that this section should be understood as a tourist's contact with an attraction that was previously unknown. Many travellers, in an attempt to familiarise themselves with the region visited, access a range of texts with information about the destination region. Leiper (1995) divided the so-called marker – or in my application, texts – into three categories, described hereunder.

Generating markers/texts, which tourists come across while in their home environment. These are potentially different books or programs on television or radio about the destination, and even 'official' websites. The name refers to the suggestion that these texts might *generate* tourist activities by motivating tourists to visit certain destinations.

The second category is called *transit markers/texts*, which tourists come across while travelling to a destination – such as articles in local newspapers, as well as advertising in the media and in regional brochures. They are texts encountered en route and are thus not the primary reason for the journey taking place, but they have an impact on how the more detailed itinerary is planned and executed.

The third and final parts are texts found when experiencing the attraction, either in the form of oral accounts from other stakeholders or in the texts and constructions that are erected to present the attraction. This category also analyses brochures published by the Visitor Information Centre and other local businesses, which are only found at the destination, and each of which would be seen as *contagious markers/texts* in Leiper's (1995, p. 143) terminology.

Rather than analysing each text about a tourist attraction as an entity on its own, I have decided to collate some information sources – in the way a tourist would do when travelling towards a region, or in that region – and collectively analyse these texts for the messages they have and the fabula they construct. There is no empirical reason for choosing these texts beyond others available; the selection is simulating what a tourist could come across if doing the same journey.

DISCUSSION

Thunderbolt and Uralla

'Captain Thunderbolt' was a bushranger, basically an Australian highway bandit (Routt, 2001), active in New South Wales in the 1860s. The small town of Uralla strongly emphasises its connections to Thunderbolt; this emphasis can be found in contagious texts, such as the town's promotional material, in the naming of local businesses, and in official memorials at prominent locations in the town. I will in this analysis suggest that the attraction of Thunderbolt is strongly connected to a larger national appeal to romanticise non-Aboriginal history in rural areas by highlighting certain attributes that fit modern ways of thinking and acting (Schlunke, 2005, p. 43).

Turner highlights the discursive formations that are brought into being, through the way narratives are told in Australia. By preferring certain narratives to others and by inscribing in tourist practices common values for Australians, it becomes possible to uphold a hegemonic

meta-narrative about what it means to be and act as an Australian. Or, in Turner's words: 'narratives are ultimately produced by the culture; thus they generate meanings, take on significances, and assume forms that are articulations of the values, beliefs – the ideology – of the culture' (1993, p. 1). That the narratives produced highlight and prefer certain meanings over others is therefore a natural outcome of that ideology in action. The theme of Australian narratives – regardless whether these are found in books, films, TV series, or tourist attractions – all build on a range of national myths that are constructed and self-reinforcing.

Tourist texts relating to Thunderbolt

The official Visitor Information Centre Internet site – www.uralla.com – has extensive sections both about what there is to experience in Uralla and in regards to Thunderbolt, and also historical descriptions of the gold rush, Mary Ann Bugg – Thunderbolt's 'wife', and about Thunderbolt. The section about Thunderbolt sets out a comprehensive diegesis about his life, starting from his father's arrival in Australia and then, date by date, lists the robberies Thunderbolt was associated with throughout his 'career' as a bushranger. Whilst the section about Mary Ann Bugg acknowledges that she was of Aboriginal heritage, and that her opposition to violence had influenced Thunderbolt's actions as a 'gentleman bushranger', it is surprising how little that official web site otherwise discusses the original population of the area.

The website recognises that the township's name is probably taken from the Indigenous term meaning 'ceremonial meeting place', but makes no further comment about that except to suggest that it is a suitable name for Uralla's location at the crossroads of several highways. The only other mention of the area's Aboriginal heritage can be found under a link about *nature* [sic!], where a short description is given of local rock paintings. Osuri and Banerjee explain that this combination of Indigenous peoples and nature is a reoccurring phenomenon in traditional Western museums. This is also the case in modern tourist attractions such as '*The Outback Spectacular*' at the Gold Coast in Queensland. Dioramas portray Aboriginal people in natural settings, essentially constructing them as backward while simultaneously consolidating for white Australians 'the status of being at the forefront of progressive human history' (Osuri & Banerjee, 2003, p. 145). Hughes-d'Aeth quotes Robert Dixon, who suggested that 'the Australian colonial tour constituted an iconic narrative that was used to measure the progress of civil society, and that relied on the contrast between Aboriginal "savagery" and European "civilisation"' (1999, p. 51). So whilst the website frames the diegesis of Thunderbolt well and informs the reader about the township's chosen main attraction, it simultaneously distances alternative interpretations by silencing them.

Examples from the texts surrounding Thunderbolt and Uralla can be found in several brochures. Uralla is, for example, mentioned on two pages in *The North Coast Monthly imag* (Melrose, 2004). The two texts on the page are different to all the other texts in the brochure as they do not contain one word about what the town currently offers; all text refers to Uralla's past:

The History of Uralla – Uralla's heritage is closely connected with gold, [sic] Although gold had been discovered earlier at Rocky River, a 'deep lead' was found in February 1856 on the side of Mount Jones under the overlying basalt. Uralla benefited from the 'rush' of over 5000 people to the area and soon became a small township.

Uralla began life as a shepherd's out station after Colonel Henry Dumaresq chose his squatting run in 1834, which he called Saumarez. The government surveyed a reserve in 1849 at the foot of Nit [sic] Mutton and Mt Beef enclosing a portion of both Rocky and Uralla Creeks. These creeks became a testing [sic] place for the squatters as they journeyed north in search of grazing lands. An accommodation house and inn was soon erected and

Samuel McCrossin became the licensee. This inn was on the sight [sic] of the present Bowling Club greens (Melrose, 2004, p. 13).

That this text omits Thunderbolt from its story is not the most significant feature, rather that the text does not include any of the elements that other descriptions of the township contain, and that it does not feature anything that a traveller today can experience, is even more significant, taking into consideration that this brochure is produced as a 'visitors' guide'. The area's Indigenous history is totally ignored here, and the only history served up is of gold rushes, squatters, and the government's land survey, none of which can be tangibly experienced anymore. Another example of this same lack of awareness about racially incorrect Australian narratives is found in a critical analysis of Australian filmmaking.

Langton claims that '[o]ne of the major problems for the Australian Film Commission is to find ... critical thinkers, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who can assess both individual and community scripts ... [that] include a knowledge of and sensibility towards Aboriginal cultural values and the impact of history' (1993, p. 84). What Langton is referring to, in regards to Aboriginality, is that all stakeholders involved in creating images have 'to distinguish between colonial and anti-colonial representations' (1993, p. 84). It could naturally be claimed that no mention in the tourist brochure analysed of the Indigenous people who used to live in the area before the colonial era is better than an incorrect depiction. I would, however, counter that any history that starts from the first signs of non-Aboriginal influence in an area, and relegates Indigenous history to nature, is a hidden attempt to reconfirm the '*Terra Nullius*' argument. Pugliese states: '*terra nullius* is something that filters down into the practices of everyday life. *Terra nullius* functions to render Indigenous heritage and history invisible at the level of heterogeneous practices and sites ... at the seemingly banal or inconsequential levels of everyday life, for example, simply going to the cinema or visiting a tourist site' (2002, p. 14 - 15). This omission is especially surprising as it is placed next to another text where the region's connection with its colonial past is highlighted, namely a story about Thunderbolt.

Page nine of a brochure called *Around & About Waterfall Way* (Cody, 2004) concentrates mainly on Uralla, with a third of the text on the page stating:

As fortune would have it and I am sure that Captain Thunderbolt would agree, Uralla is nicely situated on a junction of three main highways. But rather than contemplate what Thunderbolt might have done in the 1860's we prefer to welcome those travelers that stop over for a coffee and a break. Servicing many places, the original inhabitants, the Anaiwan and the Moshe tribes called this the 'Meeting place' a distinctly appropriate name then and now. From East and West, North and South, the junction of roads lies through the middle of Town nestled in the Rocky River tributaries that flow down on to the great Murray-Darling Basin... (Cody, 2004, p. 21).

The use of Thunderbolt in the text is without any explanation about who he was; it is, rather, building on an assumed knowledge amongst readers. Assumed knowledge can feed a feeling of intimacy for people who can relate to the knowledge, but it can equally become a barrier that assures 'outsiders' that the attraction is not meant for them (Golden, 1996, p. 233). The only tangible information a traveller without previous knowledge of the Thunderbolt legend would receive from this brochure is the notion of Uralla calling itself 'Thunderbolt Country', and that Captain Thunderbolt had something to do with the 1860s. It can thus be suggested that travellers would construct a rather vague narrative about Thunderbolt, if any at all, and that other sources are needed to actually feed travellers' interest in learning more about the attraction.

A positive feature of the text is, however, its emphasis on the original inhabitants of the region by naming the Indigenous peoples that gave the township its name. Lambert suggest that

Australian films often suffer from the suppression of 'the importance and visibility of certain active representation' of Indigenous realities, something he calls a '*filmic terra nullius*' (2000, p. 8). Even a brief mention, like the brochure text above, allows for a wider understanding of the continuity of history, and therefore does not create the '*touristic terra nullius*' that is so common in the Australian tourist industry.

Rowe, for example, points out that 'Aboriginal people living a traditional tribal existence can be admitted and accommodated [in tourist discourse], but not that of Aboriginal inner urban or outer suburban dwellers' (1993, p. 265). Morris similarly highlights that visible Aboriginal culture in Australia seems to be produced as a *product* for tourists' consumption (1995, p. 188, emphasis in original). This strange dualist way of representing Aboriginality can be traced to the uncertainty the majority non-Indigenous population has in finding suitable modern 'cohesive models of socially being and belonging' (Potter, 2002, p. 1). By producing memorials and selecting specific heritage attractions, national myths like bush romanticism can be sustained, and the violent colonisation of the land can conveniently be forgotten. The fact that a place that carries an Indigenous name, and an associated history, is not acknowledged in most tourist texts is, the creation of a *touristic terra nullius*.

CONCLUSION

I set out to demonstrate in this paper that any tourist attraction holds power as an element in the formation of national identity, not because of the core attraction, but rather due to the meta-narrative it is based upon. A dimension of that suggestion is that physical properties of attractions are less important for visitors, than are the texts and stories that surround the attractions. The aim was to present an alternative reading of a tourist attraction in order for current and future tourist managers to appreciate the range of possible interpretations available for the attractions they market and manage.

The chosen texts analysed in this paper constitutes only a selection of texts available to tourists to the region, as an example of how texts construct attractions as abstract narrative entities. Interpretive signs and brochures, pictures, songs and audio-visual material are all alternative texts beyond the marketing examples here chosen, that might influence visitors' experiences of the attraction and their engagement with the destination before, during and after the visit. However, these alternative texts are beyond the limits of this short paper, but are presented in the full thesis this article is an extract from (Edelheim, 2007a).

The physical attractions of Thunderbolt, for example his grave and the statue, are corporeal evidence of what there is to see. Neither of these physical attractions is, however, especially distinctive from a visitor's point of view. The description in all texts is focused on the events that made Uralla famous, the sites where the events took place being of lesser interest. What makes the attraction into an attraction is the narrative that surrounds it. This is by no means unique for this attraction; sites of battles, houses that famous people have resided in; and locations that have appeared in films are all examples of attractions that are made up of the texts surrounding them. But also natural attractions such whale-watching or amusement parks are ultimately experienced and appreciated for how they are presented, as examples of ecological wonders or entertainment industries, rather as objects in themselves. To start defining attractions as narratives is thus a logical step.

The original Indigenous population in Uralla is mostly referred to in passing as having given the township its name, but no present day attractions are linked to the present Aboriginal population. The only reminder of the Indigenous history of the region is the Yarrowyck rock art site outside town, and even this reminder is found under 'nature attractions' on the official web site (Uralla Visitor Information Centre, n.d.). The greatest emphasis the Indigenous population is granted comes from the fact that Thunderbolt's 'wife' was of Aboriginal heritage, but many

of these texts are formed from a very unapologetic non-Aboriginal perspective with passages that could be described as ethnocentric in present society.

The concentration on one specific attraction in this small township essentially creates something I want to call a *touristic terra nullius*. It creates fabulae that visitors, as well as the local population, consume and in which history and importance is always linked to what has happened after non-Aboriginal occupation of the land. The texts nullify Indigenous history and equate it with nature, something that has developed organically without human involvement; the texts also nullify alternative texts by building heavily on accepted myths already circulating in society.

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