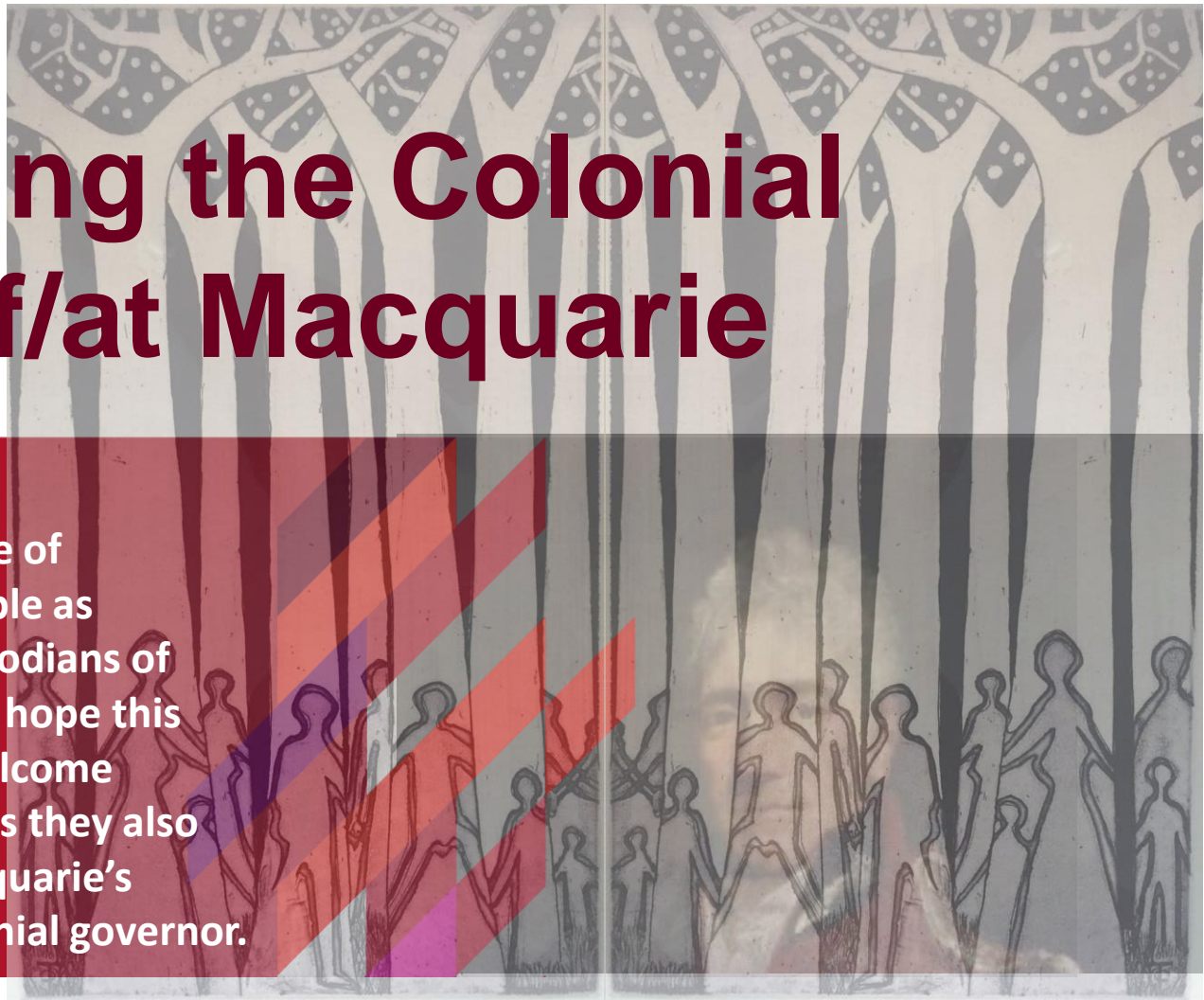


# Challenging the Colonial Legacy of/at Macquarie


Richie Howitt

[richie.howitt@mq.edu.au](mailto:richie.howitt@mq.edu.au)

I acknowledge the resilience of *muwinina* and *palawa* people as traditional owners and custodians of Country here in *nipaluna* . I hope this paper might honour the welcome offered to this conference as they also suffered from Lachlan Macquarie's ambivalent legacies as colonial governor.



# Acknowledging Country



I acknowledge the Country, Law and Ancestors of the First People of the *Wallumattagul* clan, the *Wullamai black snapper* fish people, where I have been welcomed to live and work. I appreciate the generosity of the *Dharug* Nation of the Sydney region and pay respect to their Elders past, present and future, and the wisdom and knowledge passed down through their generations.

I also pay my respects to the Country on which we meet today. I acknowledge the *muwinina* and *palawa* people as traditional owners and custodians of this Country here in *nipaluna* (Hobart) and the inspiration offered by their ongoing challenges to the imposed silence and learned and wilful ignorance of colonial narratives. I acknowledge that First Nations across Australia, never ceded their Country and Law to the colonisers. We are all diminished, constrained and limited by this burden on the Country and its people.

# Macquarie University: radical and unconventional?

Despite Macquarie University's reputation as a radical and disruptive player in Australian higher education when it was established in the mid-1960s, a wilful ignorance has long played out on the campus.

The campus was isolated from its leafy neighbourhood. There was a sense that the imaginary erasure of the Dharug cultural landscapes was reinforced by fences, walls, and boom gates blocking access to the campus. And Indigenous people were palpably absent from the campus.

# Denying Context(s)

No consideration was given to the implications for the new university of using Macquarie's name. It was used because of "his achievements as a builder, his humanitarianism and his interest in education" (Mansfield and Hutchinson, 1992, p. 30).

Beyond Macquarie's name, other traces of colonial heritage were imposed on the new university. The tower of the lighthouse Macquarie commissioned to guide the ships of empire to Sydney Harbour and the Sirius star, that guided the colonisers' ships and gave its name [unknowingly, of course] to the flagship of the First Fleet were included in the official regalia.

Mansfield, B., & Hutchinson, M.  
(1992). *Liberality of Oportunity: A  
History of Macquarie University  
1964-1989* Sydney: Macquarie  
University and Hale & Iremonger.

# What's in a name?

When the University was established, the choice of name was not discussed with the Dharug traditional owners of the university site.

Without intent, without thought, without question, the choice of name reinscribed the act of *terra nullius*, the assumption of White privilege, and the erasure of Dharug people and Dharug knowledges from this place of learning.



# An always-ambiguous legacy

Lachlan Macquarie's legacies have long been recognised as ambiguous - but not by the university.

The Chancellor celebrated that Macquarie's insistence that, "in this fledgling convict colony, there be no distinction between 'the free and the freed' ... was the foundation of the Australian notion of a fair-go for all" (Egan 2018)

But the egalitarian ethos being memorialised was, at best, only conditionally extended to the Aboriginal people whose rights and humanity were dismissed by the colonial power Macquarie represented.

Egan, M. 2018 Chancellor's Graduation Speech, Macquarie University.

# Silence is not an option

Uncritical celebrations of history like the Macquarie graduation speeches, makes the work of decolonising public discourse and transforming public institutions harder.

But even the goal of decolonising is inadequate because it starts in the wrong place with the wrong focus. It privileges the coloniser with the same invisibility cloak that creates white privilege.

Remaining mute to the changing understanding of historical context reinforces the most reprehensible evils of the Australian genocides and ongoing official and public silence about them.

# Reflecting on Macquarie

Like many colonisers, Macquarie saw Dharug people and their neighbours as primitive and in need of civilising. It was, perhaps, inevitable that he would come into conflict with the Aboriginal nations whose territory he was alienating.

Long characterised as an autocratic but humanitarian leader, Macquarie was often at odds with the empire he represented:

*Macquarie's instinctive humanitarianism fostered policies that were democratic, and at times inhabited the radical edge of the British political spectrum. The Tory establishment's governing principle was suppression of the masses; Macquarie's first and guiding principle was their elevation (Slattery, 2014, p. 12).*

Slattery, L. (2014). The first dismissal Melbourne: Penguin.



# Macquarie – civilising reformer?

Macquarie's egalitarian vision included Dharug people only to the extent that they conformed with his assumptions about them. His humanitarian instincts are often seen as somehow benign or generous – but his purpose, was ultimately about enforcing a vision of superior humanity. He:

*... had plans for the dark people. He would educate their children ... In due course they were to marry and settle, decoys of civilisation to their brothers in darkness" (Barnard, 1946, p. 160).*

*As a product of the Enlightenment, Macquarie sought to found his institution in the principles of Christianity and British civilisation as an expression of divine inspiration in human affairs (Langton, 2008, p. 38).*

Barnard, M. (1946). *Macquarie's world*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press in association with Oxford University Press.

Langton, M. (2008). Ngura Barbagai: Country Lost - 'They made a solitude and called it peace'. In R. Perkins & M. Langton (Eds.), *First Australians: An Illustrated History* (pp. 1-61). Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press.

# Macquarie – military autocrat

We should not forget that Macquarie was a military commander with much discretionary power. In 1816 he used that power to authorise an undeclared war

He issued orders that led to the Appin Massacre on April 17, 1816. His planning for this military campaign was meticulous. His secret declaration of war was meant to strike terror and discourage further resistance. Aboriginal men shot and killed during such encounters were to be hung from trees in prominent positions, to strike fear and terror amongst the surviving Aboriginal population:

*slain warriors were also decapitated, though in secret, and their heads sent off to museums in Europe (Organ, 2014, p. 4).*

Organ, M. (2014) *Secret Service: Governor Macquarie's Aboriginal War of 1816*. Paper presented at the Australian Historical Society, Mittagong, NSW.

# Addressing the ambiguous legacies

Both Macquarie's approach and his misunderstanding of the humanity, civilisation and sophistication of his Dharug hosts in Sydney set a pattern that proved foundational for the settler society that imagined it owned Australia and could treat the Country as it wished.

In carrying his name, the University inherits the colonial history created by its namesake. It should neither diminish nor reproduce the shameful dimensions of Lachlan Macquarie's legacy. That legacy is (and was always) deeply racialised and gendered – it did not include the traditional owners of the Countries being alienated, nor did it include the female convicts.

# What is the University's foundation narrative?

The University frames its foundation narrative as radical and inclusive and its current purpose as service and engagement (Macquarie University, 2013).

But, until the University explicitly addresses the implications of being welcomed to Dharug Ngurra by Dharug people – as it so often has been – how can it hope to respond to the challenge of Dharug scholars who are themselves reflecting deeply on how their own earlier generations negotiated the ambiguous challenges posed by colonial authority and its legacies?

Macquarie University. (2013). *Our University: A Framing of Futures*. Retrieved Date Accessed, 2019 from <https://www.mq.edu.au/our-university>

Locke, M. L. (2018). Wirrawi Bubuwul – Aboriginal Women Strong. *Australian Journal of Education*, 62(3), pp. 299-310.

# Truth and legacy

The University might honour a legacy of egalitarianism and commitment to education, but it must also recognise and accept that Lachlan Macquarie's approach to intercultural relations was, at best, paternalistic and reflective of the white supremacist context that produced the colony in New South Wales.

Macquarie simply assumed his own superiority, his entitlement to impose:

*... Britons interpreted disputes about land between themselves and the Aborigines as evidence that the Aborigines, not the settlers, lacked sufficient understanding of ownership. When Aborigines ate the corn growing on settler farms, for instance, the settlers understood the cause as "their ignorance of our laws relative to the right of property" rather than the reverse (Banner, 2005: p111).*

Banner, S. (2005). Why Terra Nullius? Anthropology and Property Law in Early Australia. *Law and History Review*, 23(1), pp. 95-131.

# Dharug Strategic Management Group Ltd

In 2018, I joined the board of a newly-created not-for-profit company, Dharug Strategic Management Group Ltd aims to hold the BNI site in trust for Dharug peoples and to commemorate the inmates of the institute, restore the site as a Dharug place of welcome, healing and belonging, facilitate establishment of sustainable wellbeing for Dharug peoples and their diverse contemporary neighbours, and celebrate Dharug language, culture and resilience.

DSMG confronts the task of transforming another aspect of Macquarie's ambiguous legacy outside the academy.

# Overcoming the sanctioned ignorance of the academy

Universities have long been part of colonial history. Their networks of power have abused the continent and its people.

They always taught knowledge that was disciplined into Eurocentric traditions and marshalled to catalogue, document, silence and discipline the unruly inhabitants of this incomprehensible southern land.

White privilege and its imperial imaginary transformed from *terra incognita* to *terra nullius* by the mere act of speaking.

Universities remain important in renewing White privilege.



# Reframing Macquarie's legacy

To transform into an inspiring institution that genuinely delivers inclusive and generous service and engagement, Macquarie University must do more than pretend its namesake was a good man with humanitarian instincts but limited by the dominant values of his times.

It is simply inexcusable to continue excusing genocidal stolen generations policies because those who implemented them were well-intentioned and doing what they thought was best for the doomed peoples of the southern continent they had coveted and possessed.

# Might we move closer?

Macquarie University needs to pursue transformation by moving beyond its current (admirable) Reconciliation Action Plan and Indigenous Strategy towards more radical action.

- Might we advocate Truth, Reparation and Negotiation rather than reconciliation?
- Might we advocate negotiation of much deeper ideas of shared belonging rather than reconciliation that leaves white privilege unchallenged?
- Might we step out of the colonial shadow of Macquarie's name and consider listening to Country and negotiating with the Dharug and their neighbours about what an appropriate name for an inclusive place of transformational learning might be?

# Might we ‘gladly lerne’?

Because if its name, Macquarie University urgently needs to open spaces of learning and teaching about speaking, hearing and responding to difficult truths. These difficult truths will not be addressed by simply renaming the university.

Silencing Macquarie’s name will not reinstate Dharug in the Sydney landscape – nor on the University campus. That requires:

- building relationships of recognition, respect and learning with Dharug people.
- listening and engaging with Dharug people.
- Macquarie University to cease being an institution of White enablement and
- the university to choose to gladly learn and teach critically about the ambiguous legacies of our namesake and take some responsibility for wider transformation of higher education, Australian society and Whiteness itself.

**Thank you**