

*One Day in Fremantle: TV representation of this alternative to Australia Day*

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**Abstract:** A 2016 decision by the City of Fremantle in Western Australia to change its date of national celebration generated a televised controversy about the municipal observance of Australia Day. Beneath this controversy, Fremantle's decision to change the date reflects a long ongoing struggle over the colonization of country belonging to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This struggle can be traced back to the landing of the First Fleet of British settlers in Cadigal, Eora, country (Sydney) on 26 January 1788. This paper analyses the context of Fremantle's decision and considers how television and current affairs reported it to audiences across Australia. Twenty-eight news and current affairs video recordings broadcast between 25 August 2016 and 29 January 2018 by ABC, Nine, NITV, Seven and SBS networks were analysed. Key themes emerging from this study are discussed, including: the emptiness and trouble with Australia Day representation; diversion through division and false economy; and, from genocide to solidarity with Aboriginal leadership. Finally, this paper offers an opportunity for understanding how Australian community has been imagined and how community in Australia could be imagined.

**Keywords:** Indigenous sovereignty; Australia Day; national celebration; genocide; television.

Western Australian Premier Colin Barnett explained in November 2016:

Everyone understands the history and the debate about Australia Day but Australia Day is our national day, most Aboriginal groups accept it and history is put to one side. (Bembridge, 2016)

Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation announced in January 2017:

At 10am at the Fremantle Roundhouse foreshore a massive cleansing ceremony will commence ... It is our young people's initiative to smoke the barbaric portholes of the British Empire where they held tens of thousands of our men chained and shackled prior to their transportation to Rottnest Island concentration camp of death. (Eggington, 2017)

Western Australian Premier Mark McGowan emphasised in April 2017:

There is one Australia Day. It shouldn't be played around with. I think we've had that debate now, and let's move on. (9 News Perth, 2017)

## **Introducing ~~Australia~~/Invasion Day**

Municipal demand to change Australia's day of national celebration from a commemoration of British colonisation to something more inclusive is growing despite state and federal governments wishing the change away. Tom Calma (2015) argues that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have suffered a brutal exclusion from the celebration of Australian community, and that rejection of Australia Day is an important element of ongoing resistance:

'Invasion Day' sowed the seeds of a movement by the First Australians—one underpinned by resilience and determination—to fight for our survival and the connection to our lands, without which we are not complete ... The refusal by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to acknowledge Australia Day is part of the ongoing struggle for recognition of Indigenous people's rights. (Calma, 2015, p. 11)

Aboriginal opposition to Australia Day is not new. It was clearly expressed in the 26 January 1938 "Day of Mourning" and protest in Sydney against the celebration of 150 years of colonisation (Foley, 2007, pp. 121-122; Kwan, 2007, p. 10). From that day, Gary Foley (2007, p. 122) argues, Indigenous people have marked 26 January as "Invasion Day" and by less polite terminology (p. 130). This paper examines television news treatment of the City of Fremantle's decision to invest in a day of community celebration on 28 January instead of a 26 January Australia Day. Australian-licensed television stations mediated this decision for their audiences as a controversy in challenging the latent governmental practice of investing in Australia Day celebrations that commemorate the first day of British settlement in New South Wales on 26 January 1788 (Kwan, 2007). This paper discusses the context of Fremantle's decision through an analysis of television news and current affairs clips from 2016 to 2018. Key themes emerging from this study

include: the emptiness and trouble with Australia Day representation; diversion through division and false economy; and, from genocide to solidarity with Aboriginal leadership. These themes will be discussed in subsequent sections.

## **Approaching television representation of a reimagined national day**

The imperative for this kind of work was brought home to us when we heard repeated requests from teenagers in Perth for inclusion of Aboriginal representations in public spaces, such as in the downtown city square, the airport and in their suburban streets. This would give them some pride in being Aboriginal, they said, and would counter the exclusions and negative representations that make their lives difficult and casual employment nearly impossible. These motivated teenagers provided this advice as a Youth Panel at the Decolonizing Settler Cities symposium in Perth in September 2017. They requested ordinary things, the Indigenous representations that can be found in most international airports but not in Perth, and an exchange of the American green cactus in Perth's city square for a work of Aboriginal art. In other words, they called for inclusion of their people's culture in the public life of metropolitan Perth. The problem of excluding Indigenous peoples' culture and claims and the technologies of legitimising this exclusion have been the focus of research into media and public representation in Western Australia for some time (Mickler, 1998; Kerr & Cox, 2013; Thomson, Bennett, Johnston & Mason 2015; Cox, Birdsall-Jones, Jones, Kerr & Mickler, 2016; Kerr & Cox, 2016). So, although profoundly sad, it was not surprising to hear the Aboriginal Youth Panel lament the lack of public Indigenous representations and the, integrally related, difficulty of being a proud Aboriginal person in the Perth metropolitan area. Although Indigenous representations and acts of sovereignty can be identified in public places and performances (Haebich, 2018), they are often negotiated within the constraints of expression allowed by the colonial state (Cox, 2010; Kerr & Cox, 2013). When the City of Fremantle attempted to open up a space for Aboriginal initiative in developing a community celebration through its One Day festival in 2017, we could not resist examining how popular television news and current affairs mediated this event.

Compared to other forms of media, territorialised broadcast television has been identified as the media technology that most directly addresses and consolidates communities of modern nation states because the boundary of broadcast is typically in alignment with national territory (Volkmer, 2014). All of the television stations included in this study were licensed to transmit within Australian territory by the Australian Communications and Media Authority. While the nation-state boundaries of television are being disrupted by satellite transmission and, more recently, Internet streaming, this study is as much about the end of an era in a particular form of mediated community imagining as it is about highlighting a new beginning. In attempting to further understandings of Australian television representation of ways of imagining community celebrations in Australia, we assembled a corpus of television news and current affairs clips referencing the words 'Fremantle', 'Australia' and 'Day.' The corpus of video clips was collected from the *Informit TVNews* archive as well as from commercial television station pages on *Facebook* and *YouTube*. Twenty-eight news and current affairs video recordings produced between 25 August 2016 and 29 January 2018 by the *ABC*, *Nine*, *NITV*, *Seven* and *SBS* media organisations were subject to analysis (Table 1). These videos and their

Date	Source	Title	Min's
25-Aug-16	<i>Nine News</i>	Waterside bars and cafes are set to be the biggest losers in a decision to axe Fremantle's Australia Day Fireworks	01:32
25-Aug-16	<i>ABC1 Perth News</i>	Fremantle city council has axed its Australia Day fireworks celebrations, saying it's insensitive to Aboriginal people	00:49
26-Aug-16	<i>NITV News</i>	A Fremantle city council has axed its Australia Day celebrations saying its not culturally appropriate for Aboriginal people	00:57
25-Nov-16	<i>Seven News</i>	First it banned Australia Day Fireworks now Fremantle City Council is changing the date	00:30
25-Nov-16	<i>ABC1 Perth News</i>	National day: Divisive debate: The city of Fremantle's decision to shift Australia Day celebrations two days later to heal a division within the community has generated an even more divisive debate	02:41
25-Nov-16	<i>SBS World News</i>	An aboriginal elder has condemned a city council for creating an alternative day to Australia day	02:09
25-Nov-16	<i>NITV News</i>	The city of Fremantle and Western Australia has decided to celebrate to Australia Day on the 28th of the January not the 26th	00:46
27-Nov-16	<i>ABC1 Perth News</i>	The Premier admonished the City of Fremantle for cancelling its Australia Day celebrations in favour of an alternative event two days' later broadcast	00:40
28-Nov-16	<i>NITV The Point</i>	Fremantle city council made the historic step of cancelling celebrations on Australia Day, the council will instead hold festivities two days after the 26th of January	02:10
28-Nov-16	<i>NITV The Point</i>	Just a day after a Fremantle council announced it's plans to shift Australia Day celebrations an editorial was published in The Saturday Paper echoing those calls to change the date	05:37
30-Nov-16	<i>NITV News</i>	Our elders have confirmed that the city of Fremantle did consult with them over the port cities plan to hold a celebration separate to Australia Day on the 20th of January next year	00:29
02-Dec-16	<i>ABC1 Perth News</i>	The Federal Government has upped the ante over Fremantle council's decision to hold Australia Day celebrations two days after the national holiday	01:48
09-Dec-16	<i>Nine News</i>	Fremantle council has back flipped, now agreeing to hold ceremonies for new citizens on Australia Day	00:26
09-Dec-16	<i>ABC1 Perth News</i>	Fremantle has bowed to pressure from the federal government	00:44
02-Jan-17	<i>Nine News</i>	Fremantle businesses are fighting back, announcing their own fireworks display and festival for Australia Day	01:52
20-Jan-17	<i>Nine News</i>	There's a new controversy over Australia Day celebrations with a group of Perth employees vowing to boycott the public holiday, and instead go to work	01:46
24-Jan-17	<i>ABC1 7.30</i>	It is getting close to Australia Day and there is debate about whether the date should be changed	06:58
25-Jan-17	<i>Nine News</i>	Australia Day celebrations will go ahead in Fremantle despite the Council's controversial snub for cultural reasons	02:38
26-Jan-17	<i>SBS World News</i>	What led to the city going it alone on this?	02:06
28-Jan-17	<i>ABC1 Perth News</i>	Thousands have turned out to Fremantle for its version of Australia Day celebration after the council decided to hold what it describes has a culturally inclusive event	02:26
28-Jan-17	<i>SBS World News</i>	As the port city holds its alternative to Australia Day	02:14
30-Jan-17	<i>NITV News</i>	The Fremantle city council says it hopes others will follow in it's lead after it's success of the one day festival on Saturday	02:20
09-Apr-17	<i>Nine News</i>	Two Perth councils are considering following Fremantle's lead and changing the date of Australia Day	01:57
14-Sep-17	<i>ABC1 Perth News</i>	First was Fremantle and now a third Victorian council has joined the municipal revolt against Australia Day	01:58
14-Jan-18	<i>ABC1 Melb. News</i>	As Australia Day draws closer, debate around changing the date is likely to intensify	02:58
26-Jan-18	<i>ABC1 Perth News</i>	Australia Day: Even as many West Australians were celebrating the city of Fremantle has again opted not to mark Australia Day today	02:09
28-Jan-18	<i>SBS World News</i>	The City of Fremantle its celebrating 'One Day'- its alternative to Australia Day - for Second year	01:42
29-Jan-18	<i>NITV News</i>	Fremantle's one day festival is once again being held a success, after around 17,000 people attended the Australia Day alternative	00:53

**Table 1: Corpus of television news and current affairs clips.**

intertextuality (Shapiro 2001) enabled us to identify and explore how an organised challenge to the celebration of Australia Day was dealt with during the end of an era in reproducing modern nation states through territorialised broadcast television (Volkmer, 2014). The process of analysis and our interpretations were informed by our research on contemporary spatial-rights issues in Fremantle in fields of geography and urban planning

(Cox, 2010; Cox 2012) as well as cultural studies and media studies (Kerr, 2012; Kerr, 2015), and through the experience of our research partnership with the Nyoongar Tent Embassy in examining and challenging media and public representation of Aboriginal people and their gatherings in Western Australia (Kerr & Cox, 2013; Creagh, Kerr, Cox & Ryder, 2016). This research was also informed by insights from speakers on the *Changing the date—and a State of Mind* pop-up panel at the InASA Conference in Fremantle on 9 December 2016, as well as our visits to “One Day” events and sites in Fremantle from January 2008 to 28 January 2018. In the following sections, we examine television coverage of Fremantle Council’s decision to hold a community festival two days after Australia Day.

### **Fremantle ‘scraps’ Australia Day Fireworks, exposing intolerable emptiness**

News broke on 25 August 2016 with *Nine News* reporting that Fremantle Council had voted to ‘axe’ its 2017 Australia Day Fireworks event. Nine out of 11 councillors voted to end the 10-year fireworks program on the grounds that it was culturally insensitive towards Indigenous people. Controversy in the news was constructed around the council’s decision being ‘cheap and petty.’ *Nine*’s clip shows Fremantle’s cappuccino strip to be empty and reports the city’s Chamber of Commerce saying, without irony, that the “port city will become a ghost town on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January, businesses forced to shut on our National Day.” Regarding this potential loss, media positioned Fremantle’s Mayor Brad Pettitt defending the decision. On 25 August 2016, *ABC* shows Pettitt saying:

What came out of last Australia Day, especially speaking to Aboriginal people in Fremantle, is that for them it’s a really complex day. It’s actually a day of sadness ... a day that reminds them of dispossession.

For the first few weeks of coverage, the cancellation of fireworks—a betrayal of Australian community—is the source of controversy around which all the news is constructed. Even the local scholar and “Traditional Land Owner” Len Collard is subject to this limited news frame, but he finds a way to offer a subtle, critical response through *Nine*’s coverage on 25 August:

I love the fireworks. I bring my grandkids down here. We like to watch all the flashing lights, but at the same time I think we have got to have diversity and we have got to have an opportunity to maybe try something new.

Perceptively, to remain in the frame and still get his point across, Collard gestures towards the pleasure and child-like fascination that audiences have with Australia Day fireworks. Indeed, the first 163 of 564 seconds (29%) in the news archive (items between 25 August and 25 November 2016) show empty night skies being lit up by fireworks. While every television station in the corpus constructs widespread condemnation about the loss of fireworks and divisive debate in this period of broadcast, *NITV* (on 25 November 2016) was the first to describe what would be added through the change:

Earlier this year Fremantle announced it had cancelled its 26<sup>th</sup> of January fireworks display in deference of Indigenous Australians. Now the city, south of Perth, has declared it will stage a culturally inclusive alternative Australia Day in 2017. A concert on the Fremantle Esplanade with the likes of Dan Sultan and John Butler is set for the new date of January 28.

On 25 November 2016, *SBS* visualised the change by showing clips of music videos by “former Fremantle busker John Butler and Indigenous artist Dan Sultan” in rich contrast to the conforming images of fireworks and flags that were used to open all other news on the issue between 25 August and 28 November. Dan Sultan’s and John Butler’s humanist clips provide momentary relief from the radical emptiness of night skies pierced by fireworks explosions used repeatedly to signify Australia Day celebration. While the lead into *SBS* news argues against Fremantle’s decision, the visual aesthetics of the news package offers the possibility of a richer and more personal celebration of community. Where *NITV* showed how artists and performers and municipalities could take the lead for politicians to follow, the *ABC* on 2 December showed the federal government upping the ante by “threatening to revoke the City’s power to hold citizenship ceremonies.” This apparently came in the form of a letter, sent by “assistant minister for immigration Alex Hawke on the request of WA liberal MP Ben Morton” threatening to revoke the council’s authority to hold citizenship ceremonies if it changed the date because it would be “in breach of the code that says these ceremonies can’t be used for political purposes.” Council reportedly said this contradicted earlier advice it had received from the immigration department and responded that it had received no letter. Morton, the only person shown interviewed on camera in the *ABC* clip, says:

I think Fremantle Council’s going far beyond its responsibilities of picking up rubbish and making the gardens nice in Fremantle. Citizenship ceremonies should not be part of council’s wanting to make a political statement.

The *ABC* clip suggests a bi-party political front has emerged against Fremantle’s ‘politicization’ of Australia Day. A week later, on 9 December, the *ABC* shows Fremantle bowing to pressure from the Federal Government: “It has dropped plans to hold its citizenship ceremony on January the 28<sup>th</sup>” but would still hold its One Day in Fremantle event. The mayor is shown in an *ABC* radio studio arguing for the more inclusive celebration. Then the news clip ends with a Fremantle street scene and a reporter making the public service announcement that “new citizens can attend ceremonies in Fremantle on January 26 or March 14 next year.” On the same day, *Nine* reports that “Fremantle Council has back flipped, now agreeing to hold ceremonies for new citizens on Australia Day.” Visually, *Nine* pans out from an Australiana beach-ball held by a young girl to a diverse gathering of happy, waving people. The scene then cuts to an outdoor citizenship ceremony where a mixed-ethnic audience declares its allegiance and receives citizenship certificates. The applause shown at the ceremony seems to support the backflip. Happy people decked out in Australiana are then shown on a Fremantle beach after order has been restored.

## **Diversion through division and false economy**

While the One Day initiative was an attempt to heal division, television news tended to construct division—particularly within Aboriginal communities—and divert attention away from substantial interrogation of the meaning of Australia Day. Headlines included: “First it banned Australia Day Fireworks, now Fremantle Council is changing the date” (*Seven* on 25 November 2016) and “The city of Fremantle’s decision to shift Australia Day celebrations two days later to heal a division within the community has generated an even more divisive debate” (*ABC* on 25 November 2016). All television stations, to varying degrees, construct division against Fremantle Council, and reinforce this division by presenting the opinions of conservative male Aboriginal opponents in the first three months of coverage. The views of these opponents are reinforced by *vox populi* reports of apparently everyday people on the streets of Fremantle’s retail/tourism precinct and brief comments from Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, WA Corrective Services Minister Joe Francis as well as a spokesperson for Fremantle’s Chamber of Commerce (*Seven*, *SBS* and *ABC* on 25 November 2016). *ABC*, on 27 November, broadcast Western Australia’s Premier Colin Barnett condemning the One Day initiative:

I think it is disloyal of the City of Fremantle to somehow question the standing of our national day. It’s disloyal to our country, it’s disloyal to our state and, I think, it’s disloyal to the community of Fremantle.

The news presentation of Aboriginal people opposing Fremantle’s decision came apart on 30 November 2016 when *NITV* showed Noongar elder Robert Eggington offering a photograph of Fremantle councillors discussing Australia Day in a yarning circle with a substantial group of female and male elders prior to the council’s resolution. The position of Aboriginal voices against Fremantle’s decision was, perhaps, already untenable for some viewers because all the televised Aboriginal opponents were male members of state institutions such as the Australia Day Council, the Prime Minister’s Indigenous Advisory Council, Western Australian of the Year, Opposition spokesman and Member of State Parliament and a former police officer. Representation of Aboriginal opposition had dissipated in television news by the first One Day festival on 28 January 2017, and by its second go around in 2018 it had disappeared altogether. *NITV* played a significant role in disrupting the appearance of criticism of One Day. Key footage included *NITV*’s current affairs show, *The Point* (on 28 November 2016), reframing and appending a musical clip to *SBS* new footage from 25 November. *NITV*’s clip features A.B. Original with Paul Kelly and Dan Sultan performing a remix of Kelly’s Australian classic *Dumb Things* in which Briggs (of A.B. Original) points at the camera and states, “the date’s changing!” (drawn from *Triple J*’s *Like a Version* broadcast on 25 November 2016). The *Point*’s clip closes with Kelly, Sultan and others singing the memorable line “in the middle of a dream ... I’ve done all the dumb things.”

Representation of Aboriginal opposition to Fremantle’s decision disappeared over the period of this study, even the former police officer mentioned above opposing the 2017 date change had come around and led the One Day Smoking Ceremony on 28 January 2018. No longer able to rely on conservative Aboriginal opposition, commercial media maintained division against Fremantle’s decision on the grounds that waterside bars and cafes were “set to be the biggest losers” due to the cancellation of fireworks (*Nine* on 25

August 2016). A binary in the controversy was maintained by showing Fremantle Mayor Brad Pettitt defending the decision, arguing that “we are keeping the budget, so it’s not about saving money, it’s about re-investing that money in a different kind of activity.” On 2 January 2017, *Nine* reports Fremantle businesses “fighting back” against the One Day initiative on the grounds that Australia Day “has been there for yonks and why change a good thing.” The report says businesses will hold their own fireworks display and it appropriates the council’s alternative events into the business-led fiesta: “almost 380 fed-up operators have banded together to fund a \$50,000 fireworks spectacular plus a four-day fiesta.” *Nine* excludes the inclusive One Day event from its business-led fiesta from January 26 to 29—despite One Day in Fremantle falling between the dates on January 28. The journalist seemed so misinformed that she denounced the new “multicultural event on February [sic] 28.” The reporter introduces a businessman relieved that “Australia Day celebrations have been saved.” A convenience store is shown, then its operator says to camera that businesses in the last few months have “closed down because of high, high rent.” If it were not for the reporter’s frame, audiences would be correct in assuming that the systemic challenge to businesses in Fremantle is not the date of national celebration but high rent for shops in Fremantle. Also, the reporter neglects to mention the international business success of musician John Butler that has risen out of Fremantle and escaped this rental trap. Instead, the reporter almost spits out the word “Butler” when implicating him in leading the concert that replaces the council’s “firecracker night.” Despite *Nine* positioning itself as supporting local business, in its report, “Fremantle businesses are fighting back,” it neglects to represent the creative artists at One Day as entrepreneurs making significant contributions to the Fremantle brand and economy. John Butler, for instance, would earn a reported \$58 million in the 2016/17 financial year (Kearney, 2017). Butler’s most viewed clip on *YouTube*, with 37 million views, was filmed in his Fremantle hometown studio (John Butler Trio, 2012). *Nine* fails to recognise Butler as a successful global business that has grown out of Fremantle. The other Fremantle-raised musical entrepreneur that comes to mind is the legendary, late AC/DC front man Bon Scott. It is not surprising that council seeks to incubate local musical entrepreneurs through its national day celebration when they have proved to be a much better investment than firecrackers. Dan Sultan, for instance, starred in the successful Western Australian theatre and film musical, *Bran Nue Dae*, shot in Fremantle and written by the legendary late Baada Aboriginal composer, musician and playwright Jimmy Chi. A year later, the second One Day line-up would feature one of fastest rising stars in Australian music, Baker Boy, and the entrepreneurial high-energy dance group Djuki Mala. Yet, throughout the archive, commercial media persisted in providing a local economic rationale for the defence of Australia Day. This defence became particularly problematic when *Nine* on 20 January 2017 condemns a Perth-based company for giving its staff the option to work on Australia Day out of respect for Indigenous people. Gumala Investments is offered to *Nine*’s audience on 20 January 2017 as a do-gooding organisation for its “boycott” of Australia Day whereas hospitality and retail businesses in Fremantle are the aggrieved parties for being “forced to shut” (*Nine* on 25 August 2016). At the end of *Nine*’s report on Gumala Investments on 20 January, the Australian flag is flown across the screen under a super-imposed text asking viewers to say whether they “agree with a boycott of Australia Day out of respect for Indigenous people,” then the anchor unashamedly promotes her network by telling the audience: “Head to the Nine News Perth Facebook page to have your say.”

The false economy continues on the eve of Australia Day 2017 when *Nine* laments Fremantle's bars and restaurants having to pay "for entertainment and activities in a bid to attract just a quarter of last year's crowd to the district," then directs viewers to "Perth's biggest party" being the Skyworks air show and fireworks, where 300,000 people are expected to watch "32,000 firework explosions" over Swan River. The report shows audiences the best vantage points and how to get to Skyworks, then cuts back to Fremantle where audiences are warned of "more conflict tomorrow." *Nine*'s reporter says to camera: "Reclaim Australia will hold a rally here in Fremantle tomorrow to show their support for businesses who oppose the decision to scrap the Australia Day fireworks here in Fremantle." By warning people to be weary of Fremantle, *Nine* undermines the very businesses that it had professed to support in this and earlier broadcasts. In the end, the real danger on Australia Day occurred on the Swan River when a pilot and his girlfriend died when their seaplane crashed during the Skyworks air show. This tragedy resulted in the state's largest fireworks display on Australia Day 2017 being cancelled (ABC News, 2017).

### **Coming to ground: the trouble with Australia Day**

A powerful challenge to Aboriginal division and false economy came from current affairs programs, *NITV The Point* and *ABC 7.30*. The longer format enabled problems with Australia Day to be aired and discussed. *The Point* on 28 November 2016 interviewed *The Saturday Paper*'s editor, Erik Jensen, about his recent editorial, which was "a call to action, not to politicians, but to musicians, artists and families to boycott events" held on the 26 January. Change the day is re-centred as a national issue. Jensen is interviewed before a backdrop of Flinder's Street Station, suggesting the principal social gathering and recent place of substantial Aboriginal protest in Melbourne. Jensen asks artists and performers to pull out of Australia Day concerts to encourage families to ask what they are celebrating on 26 January. *NITV* enables the central problem to shift from the loss of fireworks and division over the date change to become a problem of the "hard sell" of "convincing the average Australian to stop marking Australia Day on January 26<sup>th</sup>." This shift allows Jensen to inform viewers that Australia Day is not a deep-rooted tradition with this date only fixed federally since 1994. Jensen says it "shouldn't be complicated to say that the day on which we are currently celebrating Australia Day is the wrong one" because it is so linked to "dispossession." He reiterated that he supported celebrating "a national day, but we should be more articulate in why we hold that day and when we hold that day." Jensen sees an opportunity in other municipalities following Fremantle in changing the date "for their people," but also sees no federal politician will because "politicians don't want to have this conversation because they think there are no votes in it." He also reminds *NITV* viewers that this is certainly "not the single most important issue in Indigenous politics" compared to treaty or recognition. The politics in this broadcast, it seems, is all about convincing people to reflect on the beginning of Aboriginal dispossession with the flag raising at Sydney Cove on 26 January.

The potential value of cancelling Australia Day events in favour of a different national celebration becomes clearer on 24 January 2017 when the 7.30 current affairs show, hosted by Indigenous journalist Stan Grant, explores the issue in relation to meanings in the actual place of celebration. After showing various clips on the controversy

backgrounded by Cold Chisel's *Forever Now* and shots of Aboriginal activists interspersed with shots of the Australian flag, Noongar leader Robert Eggington is shown reminding viewers of the paradox of celebrating a particular history through Australia Day in which "Aboriginal people have suffered so greatly." The shot cuts from Aboriginal activists marching to have their voices heard in their distinct red yellow and black colours to images marked with the red-white-and blue of the Australian flag: From an Aboriginal-flag-wearing woman marching with a megaphone, the visual cuts to footage of six Australian flag-wearing women bearing flags on water skies. The piece then focusses on the local context with Mayor Pettitt explaining, "the idea that we have a unity day on a day of white settlement doesn't really make a lot of sense when you think about it." Then Eggington patiently informs the reporter that "the Aboriginal community have decided to hold a massive smoking ceremony at the Round House." He explains that the Round House is a former jail "where the Aboriginal men were held before transportation to Wadjemup, or what's now commonly known as Rottnest." Many viewers may not know, however, that the Rottnest Island holiday resort is built upon the mass grave of Aboriginal men interned there by the emerging Western Australian state. The reporter describes how Eggington is helping to make an alternative national day of celebration more meaningful and unifying. "White Australia," Eggington says, "the only way they know how to celebrate is, you know, put the barbeque on, fill it up with lamb and get a gutful of grog and, you know, gaze at a Skyworks show, you know, made in China." After Eggington, 7:30 cuts to the newly minted Elizabeth Quay waterfront development with Noongar elder and Australia Day WA Ambassador Dr Robert Isaacs saying: "we are one nation of people" and have to go forward and not go back. Isaacs also encourages voters at the next Fremantle election to send a message to the council that it should bring "Australia Day back to where it belongs, January the 26th." A sense of irony can be read into the second half of the piece when the British-sounding reporter interviews the British-sounding publican of the National Hotel who is promoting not just Australia Day but a "massive week long party" called "Australia Week." The publican Karl Bullers argues that "it is not about the politics, it's about the community and the business side of it." The piece then introduces Federal Liberal MP Ben Morton, who according to the report "feels so strongly" about the City of Fremantle's plan that he has taken out a full page advertisement in the local paper "calling for residents to celebrate on the 26<sup>th</sup>." Morton appears outside a tree in Fremantle's Kings Square and argues that the City of Fremantle should be "sticking to its core business of making our parks nice and clean and picking up the rubbish" rather than creating a "national debate." Pettitt then says that the current Australia Day has little to do with Western Australia because "it is New South Wales Day." The reporter then introduces Australian Unity, the "company that led the original push in the 1880s to celebrate Australia Day," as agreeing "it could be time for a change." Archival images of the Australian Natives' Association's promotional materials appear before the Australian Unity spokesperson Rohan Mead is presented supporting a rethink of the national day and saying to camera: "Over the last couple of hundred years we've come to learn much, much, more about the hugely valuable human cultures that were displaced on European settlement." The 7.30 reporter closes by reminding viewers that they now have a choice in Fremantle between "the traditional fireworks or the council's weekend alternative": a choice to "get a gut full of grog and gaze at a Skyworks show made in China ... while celebrating the beginning of a genocide within Australia" or a chance to do something better.

The only media organisations in our archive to report from the One Day event in Fremantle on 28 January 2017 were *ABC*, *SBS* and *NITV*, followed a year later by just *SBS* and *NITV*. On 28 January *ABC* opens with news anchor describing the event as Fremantle's version of Australia Day, and says, "Mayor Brad Pettitt has hailed the event a success but the state government says Fremantle Council needs to focus more on developing the port city." *ABC* provides a routine news reporting format with clean frame-by-frame images synched with an unemotional narrative. Sounds and scenes suggest a typical Fremantle street festival, which is reported as a possible distraction from the business of developing Fremantle's economy. This uneventfulness is contrasted by *SBS* and *NITV* reports focussing on the morning and evening events of the 28<sup>th</sup> respectively. *SBS* on 28 January opens with footage from a smoking ceremony as the reporter sets the scene: "At the base of Fremantle's Round House, a colonial jail, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are recognising a brutal past." The report focusses on recognising the damage of colonisation and how people can reconcile this past with the present, and reconcile themselves with each other. People are moved to tears; express their gratitude; wave smoke across themselves. The reporter continues, "it was from this coastal spot that thousands of Aboriginal prisoners were taken to Rottnest Island, or Wadjemup, from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." Authority in the *SBS* report on 28 January is given to leaders of the smoking ceremony including Robert Eggington who says:

... people are wanting that history, they are wanting that knowledge. They are wanting to find out the things in which are denied them in the education curriculums, or through political influence, or media.

Pettitt is presented by *SBS* with tracks of white painted finger trails across his forehead and down his cheeks, emotionally moved after passing through this healing ceremony. Authority rests in Aboriginal solidarity from painted youth to elders as the clip closes with two Aboriginal men, arms on each other's shoulders, looking out to sea towards Wadjemup. On 30 January, *NITV* reports on the afternoon and evening events at the nearby Esplanade Park in downtown Fremantle two days earlier. Footage opens with four people happily shouting "*Mooditj, mooditj*" ('solid', or 'the best' in Noongar language). As scenes of happy people at the event are shown, the *NITV* reporter says the event was "the perfect antidote to the anxiety many felt leading up to the 26<sup>th</sup> of January." The reporter, Craig Quartermaine, moves through the crowd getting reactions to the event. While not providing any subtitled names, some may recognise local Aboriginal activist Mervyn Eades holding a large Aboriginal flag and saying: "Today is awesome because it's inclusive." Another participant says this is a day "that we can all celebrate, can put aside differences and come together as one." No Australian flags or paraphernalia are shown, instead viewers are treated to an Indigenous dance by members of the audience. Richard Walley is shown performing Noongar music on the main stage followed by Aboriginal dance. The Mayor is positioned as a spectator, seemingly overjoyed by the occasion. Reporter Quartermaine says what this event on 28 January means to him as he wanders among the crowd:

As somebody who grew up in Perth and dreading the 26<sup>th</sup> down by the Swan River every year, to be here in Fremantle two days later and see so many people just down here and enjoying each other's company and celebrating being here together is kind of what it's about ... Brad Pettitt and the Fremantle

City Council received so much grief both federally and at a state level for taking on this decision and abandoning the 26<sup>th</sup>.

## **Second go around: through genocide to solidarity with Aboriginal leadership**

On 9 April 2017, *Nine* reports that two other councils in Perth are considering following Fremantle's lead in changing the date of Australia Day celebrations despite a backlash from locals and businesses." The report recycles earlier footage of empty skies, fireworks and Aussie stereotypes before introducing the new Western Australian premier, Mark McGowan, reiterating the last premier's position and attempting to close down debate about Australia Day. On 14 September 2017, *ABC* reports: "First it was Fremantle, now a third Victorian council has joined the municipal revolt against Australia Day." Moreland Council in Melbourne voted to shift the date to a day that is "more acceptable to Aboriginal Australians," following similar decisions by nearby councils. The report offers nuances in the debate within the Moreland Council Chamber by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. A polarised debate was constructed within the Aboriginal community with "Gary Murray, Member of public" asking the council: "Why would black people, Aboriginal people, celebrate a holocaust." The council votes to change the day then immediately "Ian Hunter Wurundjeri elder" is shown condemning the council for taking away Australia Day and asking, "Are you going to take away Ramadan? Are you going to take away Christmas?" Cutting away from the community-filled interior of the council chamber to a shot of the lone Assistant Minister for Immigration, Alex Hawke, offers a sense of federal authority being restored despite the reporter's problematic narrative: "The federal government has condemned the debate saying comparing the date to the holocaust is offensive." Murray's claim about historical events is undermined by the reporter while Hunter's claim about the council possibly cancelling Christmas goes unchecked. The structure of the report arguably implies that the federal government could remove the council's right to hold Australian citizenship ceremonies because of the holocaust statement. The *ABC* news item closes with an affirmation of the importance of Australian citizenship ceremonies in Moreland and other municipalities while the debate around Australia Day continues.

In October 2017 voters in Fremantle returned Brad Pettitt and much of the Fremantle Council for another term in office despite the dominant media construction of popular offence against councils that attempt to "hijack Australia Day" (*ABC* on 14 September 2017). Then on 14 January 2018, *ABC* reports that Fremantle Council's decision "to ditch" Australia Day celebrations was not as controversial as first reported. This headline news is offered in relation to a Tasmanian council's decision to hold an alternative celebration in 2013. The first half of the *ABC*'s report presents Indigenous people talking about the suffering of Aboriginal people exiled to Flinders Island through a colonial technique replicated in the transportation between Fremantle's Round House and Rottneest Island. An examination of these technologies supports Murray's holocaust claim, denied by the Assistant Immigration Minister. Racially identified people were herded en masse into concentration camps where many died; racially identified people were forced to work without pay; records of racial identities were collected and stored by government; and, territories occupied by a genocidal authority were cleansed of racially identified people. That these technologies signify holocaust to some people in Australia is understandable.

The challenge accepted by Fremantle councillors was to face up to local acts of genocide and be guided by Aboriginal elders to a space where non-Aboriginal Australians could build an alliance under an Aboriginal flag. On the morning of 28 January 2018, a community healing process was led by Aboriginal leaders, building on the previous year's smoking ceremony at the Round House jail that addressed its role in genocide. This healing process included a richer re-articulation of the relationship between Walyalup (Fremantle) and Wadjemup (Rottnest Island) on pre-colonial terms. Through this healing ceremony and the fun Aboriginal-led music festival later in the day, it became possible for non-Aboriginal Australians like us to imagine the possibility of people in Australia being unified under an Aboriginal flag.

It takes courage to reimagine Australia this way. Mayor Pettitt was accused of being "disloyal" by Premier Barnett, accused of acting outside his jurisdiction by a Federal MP, and threatened with consequences by the Assistant Minister of Immigration. On 26 January 2018, before a giant Australian flag backdrop *ABC*'s anchor announced: "Fremantle has once again opted not to mark Australia Day today." *ABC* shows scenes of relaxed celebration from the previous One Day festival, then interviews from the street framed in support of maintaining Australia Day, and then scenes from Fremantle Council's Australia Day Citizenship Ceremony. The overall effect of this footage and a short interview with Mayor Pettitt minimises Fremantle's role in controversy around Australia Day. Instead, controversy seems to have moved to other places, including Perth where a small street march by Reclaim Australia supporters is contrasted against hundreds of people assembled in the city square for "an Invasion Day rally led by Aboriginal elders." Noongar elder Ben Taylor is shown on microphone calling on people to stand together "to get this date changed because there is too much fighting and suffering." Despite the potential of One Day to heal and unify, it was left to *SBS* and *NITV* to report on it in 2018. *SBS* on 28 January describes a successful inclusive community event in Fremantle despite "triggering a backlash from the Prime Minister, the West Australian Premier and many in the business community." From the festival in Esplanade Park, Mayor Pettitt appears on *SBS* in the most relaxed state of any of the clips, saying:

Doing this again was a no brainer, we just wanted to build on that and really make it something that Fremantle was really proud of. We had an amazing smoking ceremony down on the beach this morning with the community cleansing the place, and then the idea of this afternoon is a celebration of Australia but on a day that doesn't have the baggage that January 26<sup>th</sup> does.

Pettitt is followed by Noongar singer Gina Williams at the festival site on 28 January on *SBS*, saying:

We had the event and the sky didn't fall in, and we didn't break Australia, and actually what happened was a really beautiful, inclusive, wonderful concert.

On 29 January 2018, *NITV*'s anchor announces:

Fremantle's One Day festival is once again being hailed a success after around 17,000 people attended the Australia Day alternative. It is the second

year in a row the West Australian city's council has changed the date of its celebrations out of respect for First Nations People.

From the newsroom, *NITV*'s visual cuts to the One Day stage where contemporary Aboriginal dance crew Djuki Mala and hip hop artist Baker Boy perform. Afterwards, one of the Djuki Mala dancers is interviewed, saying: "The main thing is being amongst everyone and seeing the solidarity between all cultures here."

## **Conclusion**

This paper investigated how an organised challenge to the celebration of Australia Day was reported by television networks in Australia. An intertextual analysis of twenty-eight news videos highlighted how news items constructed opposition to Fremantle's decision to change its date of community celebrations. Key themes emerging from this study include: the emptiness and trouble with Australia Day representation; diversion through division and false economy; and, from genocide to solidarity with Aboriginal leadership. The emptiness and trouble with Australia Day representation is reinforced through an unproblematic treatment of the 26 January national day of celebration which relies on history being put to one side. News images of fireworks lighting up night skies can be considered a metaphor for the emptiness of Australia Day. Diversion through division and false economy reflects the way that television news structures a division relying on a small selection of male conservative Aboriginal voices representing opposition to Fremantle's decision. As these oppositional voices dissipate, a discourse of economic loss suffered by business in Fremantle becomes the source of news controversy. In the end, however, Indigenous television, Indigenous media workers and Indigenous community spokespeople find a way to report the ongoing trauma of genocide and methods of collective healing. Through the analysis of television news and events, this paper offers an opportunity for understanding how Australian community has been imagined and how community in Australia could be imagined.

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