

**National Days and the  
Politics of Indigenous and  
Local Identities in  
Australia and New Zealand**



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Patrick A. McAllister

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY  
CHRISTCHURCH, NEW ZEALAND

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*For Carolyn*



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# Preface and Acknowledgments

On my first Waitangi Day in New Zealand in 1999, two months after my arrival as an immigrant from South Africa, Television One News broadcast scenes of Waitangi Day celebrations at Okains Bay on Banks Peninsula, not far from Christchurch. Local Maori and Pakeha (New Zealanders of settler ancestry) were shown paddling a *waka* (a Maori canoe) and a naval cutter together up the Opara river. On the same day, at Waitangi in the Bay of Islands, where the Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840, Maori expressed dissatisfaction with their Treaty partners, and there were obvious tensions and disharmony between the two groups. The following day the local Christchurch newspaper, *The Press*, carried photographs and reports of both events. The Okains Bay celebration was portrayed as one marked by harmony and mutual respect between Pakeha and Maori, while tensions and conflict seemed to be the order of the day at the national celebration, the one at Waitangi itself. As an anthropologist settling in a new country, my curiosity was aroused. What was going on here? Why was there such a marked difference between Waitangi Day at Waitangi, and Waitangi Day as celebrated at Okains Bay, a local variant? More generally, what was New Zealand's national day all about?

I was soon able to start seeking answers to this puzzle, thanks to the University of Canterbury, which not only employed me to develop the University's inaugural Anthropology programme, but also provided research funds and, later, periods of sabbatical leave, for which I would like to express my sincere gratitude. The research project that I developed stretched beyond New Zealand to Australia, largely because I felt that a comparison (one of the hallmarks of social and cultural anthropology) might provide insights into the nature of their respective national days, and into indigenous and local responses to national day events, that a study of only one country might not do. It is well known that New Zealand and Australia are closely related socially and historically, with in some ways similar (largely Anglo-Celtic) settler cultures but rather different trajectories especially in terms of settler-indigenous relations,

as well as in other respects. Comparisons of the two countries political and social histories are commonly made.<sup>1</sup>

The research thus took place in four sites, two in Australia and two in New Zealand: In New Zealand, my study of Waitangi Day took place from 2001 to 2006, largely at Okains Bay, and intermittently also in Port Levy (Koukouraratata), the ancestral home of most of the Maori people involved in Waitangi Day at Okains. I attended meetings of the Board of Trustees of the Okains Bay Maori and Colonial Museum, where the event is held annually, interviewed residents of and people associated with Okains Bay and Port Levy, attended events at both sites, recorded (and at times assisted with) Waitangi Day commemorations at Okains, co-produced a video on Waitangi Day at Okains for use by both the Museum Board and the Koukourarata *runanga* (council), and perused documentary material relating to the history and development of the Museum and the Waitangi Day event there. I also interviewed Maori associated with Te Runanga O Ngai Tahu (TRONT), the governing body that oversees and administers the activities of the Ngai Tahu *iwi* (tribe) and was provided with documentary material by the TRONT publicity office.

To contextualize the Okains Bay data I needed to obtain an understanding of Waitangi Day as a national event. To this end I travelled to the far north, to Waitangi, near Paihia in the Bay of Islands, where I spent a week that culminated in Waitangi Day in February 2004, and I repeated this again in 2005. I cannot claim that it was in-depth research, since I was seeking mainly to obtain an overall picture against which to make comparisons with Waitangi Day at Okains Bay, but I did participate in activities there and interviewed some of the people who were in attendance, and had numerous friendly conversations with others. By supplementing my observations of events at Waitangi with material gleaned from the literature on Waitangi Day, on the Treaty of Waitangi, and from the print and visual media, I established what I thought was an adequate understanding against which to examine the nature of Waitangi Day events at Okains Bay. Waitangi Day as celebrated in the Bay of Islands is fully reported in the press every year, and has been scrutinised in some important academic work (Orange 1987; Orange 2004; Abel 1997).

I attended and participated in Waitangi Day at Okains Bay on four occasions (2001–3 and 2006) and was able to observe the planning that went into the Day in 2004–5. I would like to acknowledge the help that I received from those involved in organising the event, primarily Murray Thacker, Director of the Okains Bay Maori and Colonial Museum, members of the Museum Trust Board, members of the Koukourarata *runanga*, especially Peter Ramsden, and also others associated with Okains Bay and with Koukourarata, too numerous to mention by name. Earlier versions of chapter 4, dealing with Okains, were read and commented on

by Murray Thacker, Peter Ramsden, Tammy Kohn and Adam Kaul. Dame Joan Metge read and commented extensively on an earlier version of chapter 3, and I owe her sincere thanks for helpful suggestions. I am also grateful to two post-graduate students, Alex Broom, who assisted me briefly in 2001, and Nathaniel Ward, who worked as a research assistant in Okains during the 2002–3 summer vacation, and produced a valuable report containing insights that I have drawn on.

In Australia the fieldwork followed a similar format. In order to obtain a general overview of the nature of Australia Day in a major centre I spent some days in and around Sydney on Australia Day in January 2003 and January 2006. This was supplemented with published accounts of Australia Day such as those associated with the bicentenary, and with documentary material from press reports, internet sources, and the like. Interviews were conducted with staff of the Australia Day Council of New South Wales (ADCNSW) and I was given access to their publicity material and press cuttings. I would like to thank Danielle Smalley and Kylie Milwood of the ADCNSW for their assistance and for making available unpublished material relating to Australia Day celebrations in the State.

The data on two Indigenous responses to Australia Day at the national level (the Survival concerts and Wogganmagule) was obtained from two main sources: During the summer of 2005–6 I was granted a Summer Studentship by the Social Science Research Centre at the University of Canterbury and engaged a post-graduate student, Angel Bright, to research the Survival or Yabun concerts, as they later became known, both through documentary sources and by attending the concert in Sydney in January 2006. Later, Angel decided to do research for a Master of Arts degree on an Indigenous song and dance Australia Day performance that was initiated in 2003, called Wogganmagule. I have drawn on an article that she published on this event (Bright 2011) as well as on my own observations of Wogganmagule in 2006, and on relevant documentary material. The material on the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in chapter 6 is drawn from published and internet sources.

My research on Australia Day at the local level, which included Indigenous responses to the day, was conducted in Lismore in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales. I spent approximately four months in Lismore between November 2000 and February 2003 and was present for three successive Australia Days (2001–2003). During this time I attended meetings of Lismore City Council's (LCC) Australia Day Community Committee (ADCC). As in the Okains Bay case I was aware that it is important to document the preparation for performance, as well as the rehearsals, the planning, and the negotiation and modification of intent that precedes the performance proper as well as the reactions to and consequences of performance, the aftermath (Schechner 1986, Fabian 1990).

I interviewed a wide range of people in Lismore—current and former ADCC members, LCC employees and ex-employees, city residents, academic staff at the local Southern Cross University, Australia Day award winners and nominees, staff of the *Northern Star* and the *Northern Rivers Echo*, members of the Bundjalung Elders Council, staff of ATSIC (the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission), members of the Ngulingah Land Council, and many individual members of the Lismore Indigenous community. I am extremely grateful to all of those who volunteered their time to answer my questions and share their knowledge with me. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the Mayor of Lismore at the time, the late Bob Gates, his partner, Helen Gates (Chair of the ADCC from 2001–2003) and the Council support officer, Ms Sue Wade, who were extremely helpful in providing me with access to meetings and to Council records. Ros Irwin, who was Deputy Mayor of Lismore in 1995–1997 and Mayor in 1997–1999 (the first woman elected to both of these positions in the city) was also extremely helpful, given that many of the key events that I describe in chapter 7 took place during her tenure. Judith Light, a leading figure in the local Bahai community and member of the ADCC, was also very helpful on a number of occasions.

I am grateful to Taylor and Francis for permission to use substantial sections of two of my published articles: ‘Waitangi Day, Okains Bay: Contest, Cooperation and the Construction of Place in a Local Commemoration of Nation in New Zealand’ (*Anthropological Forum*, 21 (2): 153–173, 2011); and ‘National Celebration or Local Act of Reconciliation? Public Ritual Performance and Inter-Ethnic Relations in an Australian City’ (*Anthropological Forum*, 19 (2):163–183, 2009).<sup>2</sup> I am also grateful to the editors of *SITES* for permission to use material previously published in another of my articles: ‘Waitangi Day—An Annual Enactment of the Treaty?’ (*SITES, New Series*, 4 (2): 1–26. 2007).<sup>3</sup> Finally, my thanks to colleagues at the University of Canterbury who have commented on aspects of this book in a number of staff seminars, and to Michael Whisson, of Rhodes University, Grahamstown (South Africa), for reviewing and commenting on the bulk of the chapters that follow. I would like to thank Angel Bright and Kai Lehmkuehler for permission to use the images of Wog-ganmagule in chapter 6.