

Tom Frame (ed.), *Anzac Day: Then and Now* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2016)

Anzac Day occupies an uncomfortable space in Australian historiography. Despite the announcement from some commentators that the nation had hit Anzac fatigue during the centenary of the Gallipoli campaign in 2015, with slogans such as 'brandzac', and 'Anzackery' rippling through media commentary of the occasion, the day itself still drew hundreds of thousands of people from around the country to commemorate.

The overwhelming national sentiment expressed on 25 April in recent years demonstrates that Anzac Day is indeed an extraordinary spectacle of collective national remembering and memory making. Its popular solemnity even prompted Mark McKenna to wonder if 25 April had become a holier day in the Australian calendar than 25 December?

To what do we owe this extraordinary expression of collective memory, asks Tom Frame in this latest collection of essays on the changing face of Anzac Day? 'It is odd for a society which is suspicious of anything that cannot be weighed, measured or timed to be attracted to an activity that appears to defy rational explanation and that seems to deliver something that words inadequately describe', he ponders (253).

That oddness seems the perfect prompt for this volume, which brings together distinguished contributors such as Ken Inglis, Carolyn Holbrook and Peter Stanley (among others) to explore the history and politics of Anzac Day. 'This collection is intended to prompt debate', writes Frame. 'There is so much personal and public investment in Anzac day that some disagreement is inevitable.' (14)

Chapters exploring the performance of commemoration through hymn, poetry and theatre sit alongside the changing performance of the day itself over time; essays on the religiosity of commemoration, including its roots in Christian sermon and the challenge of sectarianism, contrast contributions on Anzac as a decidedly secular spectacle; official narratives and commemorative pomp are examined alongside the vernacular and the everyday sadness of loss and pain among veterans and their families. Throughout, that uneasy jostling between celebration and commemoration is prominent.

'To whom does Anzac Day "belong"?' asks Heather Neilson. 'What purposes are served by public rituals of remembrance?' (127). One of the guiding tensions in the volume is how the scholarly engagement with and critique of Anzac commemoration among scholars plays out in the quotidian experiences of the Day itself. As Robert Nichols and Peter Stanley argue in their chapter, Anzac/ANZAC (the term and the day) 'is charged with a great range of emotional and political associations', which 'evolved and mutated within weeks of its coining' (69). Jeff Doyle similarly notes competing 'truths' of popular and scholarly Anzac contemplation.

The problem, as Carolyn Holbrook notes, is that those sentimental, gently chauvinistic historical readings associated with popular Anzac remembrance have been compounded by explicitly patriotic and politicised interventions. 'So ubiquitous has Anzac commemoration become,' she writes, 'and so conflated with Australian patriotism, that no prime minister would risk the charge of disloyalty by appearing less than completely and utterly dedicated to its preservation and proliferation' (228).

This has meant that any criticism of Anzac Day from academics or public commentators is frequently dismissed as 'unAustralian'. As Frame notes, 'I must confess to being uncomfortable with many aspects of contemporary commemoration and to feeling less than free to share my anxieties about the Anzac Day "experience" lest I be accused of lacking patriotic spirit' (7). Any need for self-censorship—by experienced, often sympathetic scholars—is deeply worrying.

What's missing from the volume, perhaps, is a more critical edge, which would come from a greater diversity of contributors. What about the assertion from feminist historians such as Lake that reading Anzac Day as the 'birth of the nation' has become so popular because it is more palatable than the nation's actual (colonial) birth? Or that its popularity is a form of parochial nostalgia that comes at the expense of critical historical engagement, as McKenna has argued? Or, as Henry Reynolds insists, that in remembering Anzac Day (without the frontier wars) we are undertaking a powerful act of forgetting?

This collection works because of its openness towards accommodating commemorative nuance. The tension it notes—between political, scholarly and popular engagement with Anzac Day—confirms the urge to mark this national commemoration may be ubiquitous, but

is not without a degree of ambivalence. Including some more critical voices would have considerably strengthened that important sense of historical contradiction and uncertainty.

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