

## Kate Kelly on the Lachlan

MERRILL FINDLAY

Faculty of Arts and Design, University of Canberra, Canberra, ACT, Australia

### Abstract

*Kate Kelly, the sister of bushranger Ned, spent the last decade of her life in the inland town of Forbes, on the Lachlan River in New South Wales. This article explores how Kelly is remembered in this town, and the role the print media has played in generating and transmitting these memories. This article differentiates between communicative or lived memory, and cultural memory, as embodied in newspapers, for example, and employs the Foucauldian tool of dispositif analysis to map constellations of cultural memories of Kate. The ways this iconic woman has been represented over time are discussed. How the values embodied in representations of her have shifted as the 'dominant strategic function' of her memory dispositif has changed is demonstrated. In this, the author must declare an interest: Fresh stories to the Kate Kelly memory dispositif have been added through the author's own creative interventions in Forbes, including a recent chamber opera, The Kate Kelly Song Cycle.*

**Keywords:** media, cultural heritage, cultural capital, memory, folklore, sense of place, domestic violence, inclusion, minority groups, subjectivity, identity formation

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Found drowned*

*For about a week it had been known that Mrs Wm. Foster was missing from her home, but there was no reason to suspect anything more than that she had gone away, hence some little excitement was caused in town about midday on Friday when it became known that her body had been found floating in the lagoon at the back of the Chinaman's Garden opposite the new racecourse. The police brought the body to Mrs Ryan's Carlton Hotel, where it was examined by the Government Medical Officer, Dr. McDonnell, and from which it was interred on the following day.*

(‘Found drowned’, 1898)

This brief paragraph in the *Forbes & Parkes Gazette* of Tuesday 18 October, 1898, and the more detailed report on the ‘magisterial inquiry’ which followed, are the only accounts of the death of one of Australia’s most iconic women, Kate Kelly, the sister of bushranger Ned, Australia’s pre-eminent folk hero.

By 1880, the year her brother’s bushranging career came to a violent end at Glenrowan in north-eastern Victoria, Kate Kelly was a teenage celebrity, a central character in the emerging

Kelly Legend. Some 20 years later she was all but invisible. In the report of her death in the *Forbes & Parkes Gazette* she was simply the late and estranged wife of William Foster, a horse-tailer at Burrawang Station on the Lachlan River, downstream from Forbes in central western New South Wales (‘Found drowned’, 1898). Few would have associated this mother of four with the teenage heroine of the Kelly Legend.

The few documents in the historic record which trace Kelly’s life after she left Victoria strongly suggest that she and her husband actively connived to hide or obfuscate her personal identity and family history. The bride’s name on the couple’s marriage certificate was given as Ada Kelly; the birth certificates of each of the couple’s children similarly smudged her identity; and, on her death certificate, her parents are named as Thomas Kelly and Mary McClusky, rather than John Kelly and Ellen Quinn. (Mary McClusky was Ellen’s Irish mother’s name.) One has to conclude, therefore, that Kate Kelly *wanted* to become invisible. She settled on the Lachlan to escape her past.

But, given the many inconsistencies, omissions and lacunae in the documentation of her life, how is it known that ‘the right Kate came to Forbes’, as a headline in the *Forbes Advocate* (‘Right Kate

came here says friend', 1955) posed the problem in 1955, nearly 60 years after Mrs Foster's death? How is Kate Kelly remembered in this small country town, and what roles have the print media played in the memory-making process?

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Remembering is now understood to be a creatively dynamic and performative process in which the print and electronic media play critical roles (Basu, 2008). In the emerging field of memory studies scholars differentiate between the localised and unstable recounting of lived experience, hearsay and confabulation, or 'communicative memory', and 'cultural memory', the more stable, although equally selective evocation of past events, which is shared and transmitted, from generation to generation, through newspapers, television, literature, film, songs, web sites, festivals, rituals, exhibitions, national epics, memorials and monuments, for example (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995; Rigney, 2004, 2005; Rodriguez & Fortier, 2007). Cultural memory can thus be described 'as an ongoing process of remembrance and forgetting in which individuals and groups continue to reconfigure their relationship to the past and hence reposition themselves in relation to established and emergent memory sites' (Erlil & Rigney, 2009, p. 2).

In Kate Kelly's era, newspapers and magazines were the primary medium for interpreting, recording and remembering people and events. The advent of microfiche and online archives, such as the National Library of Australia's *Trove*, have given these publications a second life as an increasingly accessible mnemonic system, a deep well from which cultural memories can be hauled into the present to be re-mixed, re-emplotted and re-remembered to more comfortably fit contemporary desires, and then transmitted, in their modified form, into the future (Brockmeier, 2002; Zelizer, 2008). Most of what is now remembered as part of the Kelly Legend has been crafted from, or at least strongly influenced by newspaper reports of events which occurred in the late 1870s and in 1880, the year Ned Kelly was executed, as sourced from these repositories, and reconstituted to fit the strategic needs of the present. As Erlil observes, 'the past is not given, but must instead continually

be re-constructed and re-presented' (Erlil, 2008, p. 7). This dynamic gives the work of long-dead press reporters and correspondents ongoing agency, the power to effect change over time.

Although the complexities of actually generating and retrieving memories at a biological and psycho-social level are still inadequately understood and under-theorised, the strategy of dispositif analysis, as exercised by Foucault, Baudry, Deleuze, Agamben, Zizek and others in different contexts, including critical media studies (Röhle, 2005), is proving useful in attempting to understand how cultural memory actually works, and the role media representations play in reconstructing, recalling and transmitting memories of the past (Basu, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011). Basu (2011) explains:

A single representation in itself can exemplify a mode of remembering; however, no text, genre or technology works alone to form a cultural memory. Most cultural memories are made up of many different representations in a variety of genres and media. Moreover, it is not only a collection of representations that makes a memory but their constellation: their positioning in relation to each other. The idea of a memory dispositive allows us to begin to map those constellations and understand how they function (pp. 35–36).

Foucault described a dispositif as a 'thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophic, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid.' These are the elements of a dispositif, but the dispositif itself is 'the system of relations that can be established between these elements' (Foucault & Gordon, 1980, pp. 194–195). Deleuze simplified the concept somewhat by describing it as 'a tangle, a multilinear ensemble' (cited in Basu 2008, p. 60), while Agamben redefines it as 'literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings' (Agamben, 2009, p. 14). Tamboukou (2008) streamlined the definition further: to her, a dispositif is 'a grid of

intelligibility wherein power relations, knowledges, discourses and practices cross each other and make connections.' She points out that, within dispositifs, narratives, or stories, are 'the medium through which connections are made and regimes of truth are established' (p. 109).

The term dispositif has been inadequately translated into English as ensemble, assemblage, social apparatus, deployment, system, dispositive and dispositive, but this article will retain the unitalicised French, which evokes, for this author, geological metaphors, as it did for Foucault himself (Foucault, 1982, p. 3). This usage here is because of the word's similarity to the English *deposit*, to lay something down, as in the natural processes of sedimentation, alluviation, erosion and lava flows. Such geological metaphors highlight the inherent power of dispositifs to effect change over time, not only in the external world, but also subjectively, as Foucault emphasised. But dispositif also suggests the English words disposition and predisposition, as derived from the same Latin root, *disponere*, to arrange or set in place. These terms are particularly relevant in this context, because the triad of variables which operate within dispositifs – Power, Knowledge and Subjectivity (Deleuze, 1991) – are derived from our inherited human capacity, or predisposition, to tell stories and, from these stories, to create Selves, or subjectivities (Dennett, 1991). Our Selves are thus 'co-constituted by discursive and material/technological forces' (Højgaard & Søndergaard, 2011, p. 338) within the multiple dispositifs we each inhabit. This means, of course, that we are all always in a 'process of becoming' (Deleuze, 1991, p. 164). Foucauldians call this dynamic subjectivation: the production of subjects.

For many scholars the concept of dispositif has thus become, not only a useful collective noun for all the representations we are exposed to, remember, internalise, and enact over time, but also 'a conceptual tool in accounting for that which we have been, that which we are no longer, and that which we are becoming' (Bussolini, 2010, p. 102).

#### **KATE KELLY'S MEMORY DISPOSITIF**

Kate Kelly's fame is derived, of course, from that of her older brother Ned who is arguably Australia's most famous person, an absolute behemoth in the

nation's rural mythscape (Tranter & Donoghue, 2008, 2010). The potency of the legend which has grown up around Kelly is demonstrated by the proliferation of Ned Kelly tattoos on the bodies of young working class males, for example. Although this dispositif now primarily serves white settler nationalist and masculinist agendas (Basu, 2008; Tranter & Donoghue, 2010), the Kelly women – Ned's widowed mother Ellen and his sisters Maggie and Kate – feature prominently in it and, indeed, Kate Kelly is a much mythologised icon in her own right. In the words of the Australian folk song, *Ye Sons of Australia*: 'The daring Kate Kelly how noble her mien/As she sat on her horse like an Amazon queen/She rode through the forest revolver at hand/Regardless of danger, who dare bid her stand'.

At least five distinct phases in the evolution of Kate Kelly's memory dispositif since 1878 can be identified, each of which can also be viewed as a 'constellation' of representations (Basu, 2011, pp. 35–36). While there are no distinct boundaries between these collectivities, each constellation signifies that a distinct shift has occurred in the 'dominant strategic function' of the power relationships circulating through the dispositif (Daly & Smith, 2011, pp. 27–28; Foucault & Gordon, 1980, p. 195). This article maps some these changing relationships as new memories and new stories about Kate Kelly are created and old ones are changed.

#### **Constellation I: 1878–1880**

The Kelly Legend 'began' in April 1878 when a probably inebriated young policeman, Constable Alexander Fitzpatrick, visited matriarch Ellen Kelly's farm near Greta in north-eastern Victoria, ostensibly to arrest her son Dan. Anecdotal evidence suggests, however, that Fitzpatrick might have been more interested in the young Kate. Fitzpatrick provoked an incident of some kind, Ellen and possibly one or more of the men present came to Kate's defence, and whatever happened next – many conflicting accounts survive in the folklore – the consequences were life-changing for the entire family: Ellen and two visitors were arrested, charged, convicted and imprisoned for aiding and abetting Ned in the attempted murder of Fitzpatrick (Public Record Office Victoria, 2011); Ned and Dan went

into hiding in the Wombat Hills to avoid arrest; and the girls, Kate and Maggie, were left to manage the farm, look after the younger children, and support their outlaw brothers.

Such was the notoriety of the Kelly Gang's activities between 1878 and 1880 that they were reported throughout the Australian colonies, including Forbes. Many of the articles published in the local and regional press also featured the Kelly sisters, especially teenage Kate, a country girl with all the attributes necessary to make her a nineteenth century media star: she was seductively single, physically attractive, shy yet courageous, and demonstrably loyal to her family; she could ride a horse better than most men; and she exuded an intoxicating scent of danger and intrigue. By early 1879 she was already a celebrity: 'Miss Kate Kelly has become famous', *The Mercury* in Hobart reported in March 1879. 'She was present at the Benalla races the other day, and was the observed of all observers' ('Victoria', 1879). Kate's memory dispositive formed rapidly from this date, even on the Lachlan River. The irony is, however, that she herself may not have been able to read her own press. She was, it appears, functionally non-literate and, unlike her brother Ned, left no letters or other documents which can be confidently attributed to her to give a glimpse into her own subjectivity.

From this time, it seems, Kate Kelly's every move was watched and commented upon. 'Miss Kate Kelly, the sister of the outlaws Ned and Dan Kelly, was seen leaving Benalla at about midnight, mounted on a high spirited horse, and leading two others,' the *Camperdown Chronicle* reported:

She galloped off, and, as soon as it became known to the police, a party of police and black trackers, numbering eighteen in all, started in pursuit, as they considered it probable that Miss Kelly was going out on an expedition to convey news to her brothers and render them assistance. ('The Mansfield murderers', 1879)

Despite the best efforts of local and city reporters, Kate Kelly and her sister Maggie politely refused all requests for interviews. As one correspondent observed, the Kelly girls were 'noted for the guard they keep upon their tongues' ('The Kelly Gang', 1879).

The final showdown for the Kelly Gang came on 28 June, 1880, in the small town of Glenrowan, when Ned appeared in his now famous armour made from the mouldboards of a couple of old farm ploughs (Metraform Production, 2009). The events that followed are generally well known: Dan, Steve and Joe were killed, Ned was captured, and his sisters were grief-stricken. Over the next few months, people across the continent read about Ned Kelly's trials, the mass campaign to stop his execution, including Kate Kelly's personal appeal to the Governor of Victoria, and his death by hanging on 11 November, 1880. These events were followed by a controversial exploitation of Kate's celebrity and equestrienne skills in Melbourne and Sydney which tarnished her reputation and left negative memories in her dispositive.

### **Constellation II: 1881–1898**

The Victorian Kate Kelly, the teenage celebrity from Greta, is forever fixed in the national imaginary but, even while media representations of this mythic character were circulating, the *real* Kate Kelly, the young woman who had already experienced such violence, tragedy, sorrow, fame and infamy in her life, was finding it difficult, it seems, to cope with the stress of her family's notoriety, her own grief, and the limited opportunities she now faced in rural Australia as an unskilled and non-literate young female. In 1881, newspaper readers across the country learned that she was now living 'in a state of poverty' with her mother and sister on Ellen's small farm ('Our Melbourne letter', 1881). At some time in the mid-1880s, however, this real Kate Kelly, as opposed to her mythic persona, made a decision to leave her past behind. After brief sojourns elsewhere, she swam her horses across the Murray River into New South Wales, probably with a party of station workers she knew, headed north towards the Lachlan River, and changed her name to start her life afresh.

Even though folklore about Kate Kelly is tantalisingly rich in Forbes 'the real Kate Kelly' remains elusive. No-one is alive today who actually knew her, and nor does she have any descendants in the district to cultivate her memory. Beyond the official documentation of her marriage, the birth

of her six children and her death, plus the account of the inquest in the *Forbes & Parkes Gazette*, little remains in the public domain to record the years she spent in and around this town between the mid-1880s and 1898. And no official record of the inquest into her death survives (R. Hollis, personal communication, May 14, 2008). This means that the reliability and completeness of the report in the local paper cannot be confirmed, and nor can the information published be verified. We learn from the newspaper report, however, that Kate was living on or near the corner of Browne and Sheriff Streets, Forbes, at the time of her death; that her husband was employed as a horse tailer at Burrawang Station and had 'not been at home for the last five months'; and that he had visited her on 4 October, 1898, the night before she disappeared. The following day, according to the newspaper report, Kate asked her neighbour, Susan Hurley, to write a note for her and to look after her children, including her newborn daughter. We do not know whether this note was ever presented as evidence to the inquest, and nor do we know its contents. Eight days after it was written Kate's decomposing body was found wedged against a log in the Forbes lagoon ('Found drowned', 1898).

The investigating officer, Senior Constable Garstang, was reported to have stated that there were 'no suspicious circumstances or anything to indicate foul play', and the medical officer, Dr McDonnell told the inquest that, 'owing to the advanced stage of decomposition it was impossible to form any definite opinion as to the cause of death, or to recognise the presence of marks of violence'. With neither the benefits of twenty-first century forensics nor refrigeration, and with a rapidly decomposing body awaiting burial in the cellar of Mrs Ryan's Hotel, the coroner reached the following conclusion: 'That deceased Catherine Foster was; found drowned in the lagoon on the Condobolin Road, on the 14th instant, but there was no evidence to show how deceased got into the water' ('Found drowned', 1898).

There is one other piece of evidence which could have been investigated and presented at the inquest but, it appears, it was not. Five months before Mrs Foster disappeared a brief paragraph was published in the *Forbes & Parkes Gazette* concerning her husband:

William Foster is charged with indecent language. Foster appeared before the Forbes Police Magistrate at the Police Court on Friday 20 May 1898 and pleaded guilty to using indecent language. 'Constable Webster stated the language was used in his own house to his wife, within the hearing of the public.' He was fined five pounds, four shillings and ten pence, and in default, three months in gaol. ('Fined', 1898)

Domestic violence was not a crime in the nineteenth century, but whatever was happening inside the Foster home on that day or night was serious enough for Constable Webster to intervene and charge Will Foster, a man who already had a reputation for violence, with the only offence available to him at the time: indecent language. Foster's stated absence from home 'for the last five months' suggests that he moved to Burrawang Station around the time of this incident. He also told the inquest that he had returned to Burrawang Station on the morning after he visited his wife, but no evidence exists to corroborate his story. Today his prior conviction for what would surely now be called domestic violence would almost certainly make him a suspect, or at least a 'person of interest' to investigating police. This was not the case in 1898.

Will Foster's violent behaviour was common knowledge in Forbes. Stories about him were passed on as communicative memory in many families, but domestic violence was, and continues to be, a taboo subject in the bush. His behaviour was therefore rarely discussed openly. In an interview in 2003, the late Dave Mathias who lived next door to Will Foster and knew him well, recalled him as a 'wild man' who could never avoid a fight. Mathias recalled stories from his youth about Foster giving his wife 'a terrible ride' and confessed to his interviewer that he knew 'the true story about Kate'. But 'I won't tell' (McLean, 2003). Dave Mathias strongly hinted, however, that his secret knowledge concerned events which occurred on the night before Kate Kelly disappeared and impacted upon her disappearance.

Jeffrey Bussolini tells us that a dispositif 'acts in part by determining what we can see and say in a certain historical configuration of forces'

(Bussolini, 2010, p. 100), and clearly, for Dave Mathias in 2003, the ‘configuration of forces’ which would have allowed him to speak about domestic violence had not yet arrived; nor was it the right time for the volunteer interviewer, a woman then in her late sixties, to ask direct questions about this taboo subject.

### Constellation III: 1898–1948

Even after the body of the ‘real Kate Kelly’ had been laid to rest in Forbes cemetery, new stories about her youthful persona continued to emerge. In 1905, for example, *The Melbourne Argus*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and other papers reported that a James Skillion, who claimed to be the brother-in-law of Kate’s married sister Maggie Skillion, had boasted, in a Salvation Army hall in Lithgow, that he had personally received three thousand pounds from the Kelly Gang’s 1878 Euroa Bank robbery, and had ‘spent it in travelling through America and Great Britain with Kate Kelly and Kate Byrnes (Joe Byrnes’ sister)’ (‘The Kelly Gang: Commencement of its career’, 1905). Skillion’s story was vehemently refuted by Jack Kelly, Kate’s half-brother, in a letter to *The Melbourne Argus* which was widely republished: ‘Kate Kelly never travelled further than through New South Wales and Victoria’, he insisted before updating the family history: ‘Kate Kelly (who, I may say, married Mr. Foster) died some 7 or 8 years ago at Forbes, New South Wales, leaving three children, who are at present in Greta, under the care of my mother’ (Kelly, 1905).

The following year, 1906, the mythic Kate Kelly, the eternally youthful country girl from Greta, emerged again, but in a completely new context: on the big screen in what is said to be ‘the world’s first feature-length narrative movie’, *The Story of The Kelly Gang* (Jackson & Shirley, 2006). The impact of this first feature film is hard to imagine today but perhaps it was this, and the changing nature of the Kelly Legend after Federation, which inspired the Kelly family to commission a headstone for Kate’s grave. Mrs Foster was to be remembered now as a Kelly, and on her own family’s terms. The ‘dominant strategic function’ of her memory dispositif had changed yet again.

The installation of the headstone was effected in around 1910 by Hugh McDougall, the manager

of Warroo Station near Forbes, and the person generally credited with bringing Kate Kelly to the district in the mid-1880s. His involvement is confirmed in a handwritten letter to Arthur Foster, Kate’s brother-in-law in Forbes, which survives in a family collection. This simple headstone has since become Kate Kelly’s most permanent memorial: ‘In Loving Memory of Catherine Foster [nee Kelly] beloved wife of William Foster. Died 1898 aged 36 years.’ Hundreds of people visit it each year, some to put fresh flowers on her grave.

The installation of the headstone occurred at a time when the mythic Kate Kelly was slowly being sanctified. In 1911 *The Sydney Sun* published a series of feature articles by B.W. Cookson, ‘The Kelly Gang From Within: Survivors of the tragedy interviewed’, a highly sentimentalised and widely read representation of the Kelly family (Cookson, 1911). Cookson’s stories repositioned Kate at the very centre of the ever-expanding and increasingly unstable Kelly Legend. That same year, 1911, Ambrose Pratt, a popular novelist, journalist and lawyer who, coincidentally was born on the Forbes goldfields in 1874, published a fictional memoir of Dan Kelly. One reader, Jack Bradshaw from Orange in Central Western NSW, was so outraged by the novel’s central thesis – that Dan Kelly survived Glenrowan and escaped to America – that he penned his own ‘non-fictional’ account of the events of 1880. This slim riposte, sponsored by Walker’s Bottled Ale Company, was published by *The Orange Advocate* in early 1912.

Bradshaw described Kate and Maggie Kelly as ‘noble, affectionate sisters, the greatest heroines that Australia has ever produced’ (Bradshaw, 1912, pp. 12–14). He even provided dialogue for Kate’s 1878 encounter with Constable Fitzpatrick:

my sweet pretty Katey ... let me swing my arms round your slender waist and hug you to my heart, and kiss you so lovingly, and you will find that Constable Fitzpatrick may be able to drag Dan out of this mess, guilty or innocent. (Bradshaw, 1912, pp. 17–18)

Kate refused and the rest is history.

In 1914, 2 years after the publication of these ‘true stories’, a new generation of country lads,

many of them bush larrikins not unlike the Kelly boys, volunteered for a war they could have barely understood. Amongst them was Kate and Will Foster's only son Frederick Arthur, who fought on the Western Front and never returned. His name is listed on the Commonwealth War Graves memorial at Villers-Bretonneux as Private Frederick Arthur Foster, 20025, 17th Battalion Australian Infantry, AIF, the son of W.H. and Ada Foster, of Forbes, New South Wales (Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 2008). His date of death is given as April 15, 1917.

Frederick Foster's military records show that, even though he was raised in Victoria by his maternal grandmother Ellen Kelly and his Uncle Jim, he maintained contact with his father and his Foster relatives. A poignant letter to the AIF from Will Foster, now attached to Frederick's military records, advises authorities that he had received his son's belongings and identification disc, but now requested his death certificate (Foster, 1918). A photo of Frederick and a friend, both in military uniform, has been on permanent display in the Forbes Historical Museum for years.

#### **Constellation IV: 1946–1990**

Kate Kelly's estranged husband Will died in Forbes Hospital in 1946, having outlived his wife by nearly 50 years. He was survived by all his siblings but by none of his own children. His obituary described him as 'one of the oldest natives of the Forbes district' ('Obituary', 1946). Will Foster's death seems to have opened the space for his youngest brother Edward or Ted Foster to intervene in the mythmaking process. In 1954, not long after publication Frank Clune's *The Kelly Hunters: The authentic, impartial history of the life and times of Edward Kelly, the Ironclad Outlaw*, Ted Foster wrote a letter to the editor of Sydney's *Sunday Truth* to present what he called 'the facts' about Kate Kelly. Her death through 'misadventure', as he called it, 'cut short a colourful life of a woman who possessed [sic] a wonderful disposition and devotion to home and children together with a heart of gold any Australian would be proud of', he wrote (Foster, 1954).

Ted Foster also reported that Kate's only son Frederick 'gave his life for King and country in

1916 at Bullecourt France'. This was a year earlier than his military records attest, but the error is consistent with the unstable nature of individual and cultural memory. Foster may have thought, and I speculate here, that this blood sacrifice of an only son 'washed away', or assuaged his family's collective guilt for not having protected Kate and her children from his abusive brother, and absolved him from having to acknowledge what people in Forbes already knew: that Will Foster was a wife-basher and 'a mongrel of a man', as he is still remembered today (J. Reynolds, personal communication, September 12, 2008). By linking his saccharine representation of Kate Kelly with Australia's new foundation myth – Anzac and the Western Front – Ted Foster, whether consciously or not, was signalling that the times were changing; that the 'dominant strategic function' of Kate's memory dispositif had again shifted.

The following year, 1955, 'the facts' about Kate Kelly were once again reconfigured in Forbes with publication of three conflicting stories in the *Advocate*. The first, on 29 July, 'Veteran's tale of Kate Kelly' (1955), was an interview with an Edward Ford who revived the old bush myth that 'the real Kate Kelly' had settled in Queensland. This was refuted a fortnight later by a Forbes resident, Mrs Rae, under the headline 'Right Kate came here says friend' (1955). Mrs Rae reassured readers about the identity of 'their' Kate Kelly, whom she described as 'a nice looking girl, with long dark hair' and 'a good servant', a reference to Kate's career as a home-help or domestic servant in the district before her marriage. Mrs Rae also recalled that Kate Kelly 'did not want it known generally that she was a sister of the Kelly boys' so 'went under the name of Kate Hennessey' (ibid.). While there is no doubt that 'the right Kate Kelly' did, indeed, come to Forbes, Mrs Rae's recollections are demonstrably pre-mediated. They are a hybrid mix of stories she would have read or heard over a period of six decades plus memories of her own lived experience.

And then Foster (1955b) re-entered the debate with his 'True story of Kate Kelly'. A typed copy of his manuscript is displayed at the Forbes Museum, and it is from this document that much of what is now remembered as 'the truth' about Kate Kelly's

years in Forbes is derived. Ted Foster disputed Mrs Rae's memory that our heroine called herself Kate Hennessey: 'Owing to her notoriety in the past and to avoid identification and curiosity, she used a non-de-plume [sic] and was known outside the family as Ada Foster,' he wrote. He confirmed that 'Mr. McDougal of Warroo Station' had brought Kate to the district to work 'as a domestic (general duties)' at neighbouring Cadow Station in 1885, and that she was working for the prosperous Prow family in Forbes at the time of her marriage. He also listed the names of the three children who survived her: Frederick, Gertrude and Maude (Foster, 1955a). He did not, however, give their birth dates. If he had, he would have revealed that Frederick was born just three months after the Reverend Dunstan performed the marriage ceremony. Ted Foster's manuscript is now popularly believed to be a very reliable historical source in Forbes.

### Constellation V: 2007–2011

In around 2007 the author commenced the Kate Kelly Project, a part-time creative research and Community Cultural Development initiative in Forbes, to explore the communicative and cultural memories associated with this intriguing woman, identify some of the lacunae and omissions in the folklore associated with her, and add postcolonial stories to her already substantial memory dispositif. This work has revealed not only Will Foster's record of violence, but other silences too. There are, or were no Wiradjuri and Chinese voices in Euro-settlers' folklore or collective memory about Kate Kelly, for example, even though these groups were very conspicuous in Forbes in her era. Indeed, the pastoral, farming and horticultural industries which drove the local economy in the 1890s were dependent on the labour of both these groups, and the Wiradjuri and Cantonese languages were still widely spoken in district. Kate almost certainly shopped at Quong Lee's grocery store near her mother-in-law's house in Browne Street, and would have encountered both Chinese and Wiradjuri people daily in the street. Before her marriage she would probably also have worked with them.

Both these groups, the Wiradjuri and the Cantonese, were victims of settler nationalist ideologies which emerged while Kate was living

in Forbes, of course, and which are now finding sustenance in the Kelly Legend. That it is possible to add, or reintroduce stories about *non-Anglo-Celtic* Australians to Kate's memory dispositif is a clear indication that profound shifts have occurred, in recent years, in the power relationships swirling through the dispositifs in Forbes.

The author's most significant narrative injection into the dispositif to date is a chamber opera, the *Kate Kelly Song Cycle*, which premiered in September, 2011, beside the very lagoon from which Kate's body was recovered in 1898. As the librettist of this new classical work, the author narrated the story of Kate's death in the voice of Quong Lee. In another aria, 'Poor Irish and Wiradjuri', the impact of British imperialism, racism and discrimination on both her Irish ancestors and the Wiradjuri people was poetically invoked through Kate Kelly's voice. But it is Kate Kelly's husband to whom was given the opening aria: 'Bricky's Sorry Song'. In this song 'Bricky' admits that he was, indeed, 'a mongrel of a man' and asks Kate to help him change (Carey & Findlay, 2011). This contribution to the dispositive enabled a voice to be given to previously taboo subjects through a creative exploration of the multiple impacts of domestic and other forms of violence on victims, including women and minority groups.

### FINALE

Through the Kate Kelly Project a range of communicative and cultural memories has been documented and interrogated which co-constitute, what has been defined as, the Kate Kelly memory dispositif in Forbes. This has been done in an attempt to understand how cultural memory works, and the role media and other representations play in the construction, re-construction, and recollection of memories of the past, and their transmission into the future. Five 'constellations' of media representations within Kate's memory dispositif have been identified, each of which is defined by strategic shifts in power relations and desires. Observations have been made as to how individual memories are invented, hybridised, fused, manipulated, misremembered and confabulated within each of these constellations; how taboo subjects have been consciously hushed up and 'forgotten'; and how minority voices



have been ignored and silenced. But as the power relations change so too does what can and cannot be said about Kate Kelly change, and by whom.

Kate Kelly was a member of just one family of many who were caught up in what has been called a 'land war' (Jones, 2010; McQuilton, 1979) against the vested interests of wealthy pastoralists, or 'Squatters', who, in the 1860s and '70s, controlled most of the arable land in the colonies of Victoria and New South Wales. Kate Kelly survived the 'land war' of her youth (although two of her brothers did not), and yet, in adulthood, became the victim of another set of unequal power relationships: the ongoing conflict between men and women which rages still in rural communities (Wendt, 2009; Wendt & Hornosty, 2010).

This exploration into Kate Kelly's *dispositif* has enriched knowledge of the woman herself, the violence of the era and the ubiquity of Wiradjuri and Cantonese speakers in and around Forbes in the late nineteenth century. For, as Deleuze (1991) observed, we are all always in the 'process of becoming' (p. 164). Such is the power of memory *dispositifs*.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was undertaken through the author's community cultural development initiative, The Kate Kelly Project, and supported by grants from the Royal Historical Society through its Local History Research and Publication Program, and The Regional Arts Fund, an Australian Government initiative supporting the arts in regional and remote Australia. Theoretical research has been supported by the Australian Government through an Australian Postgraduate Award and by the University of Canberra.

The author gratefully acknowledges the comments of her two anonymous reviewers and her PhD supervisor, Jordan Williams from Arts and Design Faculty, University of Canberra, and the support of her many Kate Kelly Project partners and collaborators in Forbes and elsewhere since 2007, including Ross Carey, Kerry Neaylon, Rob Willis, Carol Dukes, Forbes Shire Council, Forbes Historical Society, Forbes Family History Group, Forbes Urban Landcare, and Parkes & Districts Landcare Group.

#### References

- Agamben, G. (2009). *What is an apparatus? and other essays*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Assmann, J., & Czaplicka, J. (Trans.) (1995). Collective memory and cultural identity. *New German Critique*, 65, 125–133.
- Basu, L. S. (2008). The Ned Kelly memory *dispositif*, 1930-1960: Identity production. *Traffic*, 10, 59–74.
- Basu, L. S. (2009). Towards a memory *dispositif*: Truth, myth, and the Ned Kelly *lieu de mémoire*, 1890-1930. In A. Eril, & A. Rigney (Eds.), *Mediation, remediation, and the dynamics of cultural memory* (pp. 139–156). New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter.
- Basu, L. S. (2010). *Remembering an iron outlaw: The cultural memory of Ned Kelly and the development of Australian identities* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands.
- Basu, L. S. (2011). Memory *dispositifs* and national identities: The case of Ned Kelly. *Memory Studies*, 4(1), 33–41.
- Bradshaw, J. (1912). *The only true account of the Kelly Gang*. Orange, NSW: Advocate Print.
- Brockmeier, J. (2002). Remembering and forgetting: Narrative as cultural memory. *Culture & Psychology*, 8(1), 15–43.
- Bussolini, J. (2010). What is a *dispositif*? *Foucault Studies*, 10, 85–107.
- Carey, R., & Findlay, M. (2011). *The Kate Kelly song cycle*. Forbes, NSW: The Kate Kelly Project.
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission. (2008). *Casualty details: Frederick Arthur Foster*. Retrieved May 2, 2008, from [www.cwgc.org/search/casualty\\_details.aspx?casualty=1460704](http://www.cwgc.org/search/casualty_details.aspx?casualty=1460704)
- Cookson, B. W. (1911). The Kelly Gang from within: Survivors of the tragedy interviewed. *The Sun*. Retrieved April 20, 2011, from [www.nedkellysworld.com.au/archives/cookson.doc](http://www.nedkellysworld.com.au/archives/cookson.doc)
- Daly, A., & Smith, C. L. (2011). Architecture, cigarettes and the *dispositif*. *Architectural Theory Review*, 16(1), 22–37.
- Deleuze, G. (1991). What is a *dispositif*? In T. J. Armstrong (Ed.), *Michel Foucault philosopher: Essays translated from French and German* (pp. 159–168). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Dennett, D. C. (1991). The origins of selves (electronic version). In D. Kolak, & R. Martin (Eds.), *Self and identity: Contemporary philosophical issues*. Retrieved April 26, 2008 from <http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/originss.htm>
- Eril, A. (2008). Cultural memory studies: An introduction. In A. Eril, & A. Nunning (Eds.), *Cultural memory studies: An international*

- interdisciplinary handbook* (pp. 1–15). New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter.
- Erl, A., & Rigney, A. (2009). *Mediation, remediation, and the dynamics of cultural memory*. New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter.
- Fined. (1898, May 21). *Forbes & Parkes Gazette*.
- Foster, E. (1954, October 20). Handwritten copy of letter to the editor. Foster family collection. *Sunday Truth*.
- Foster, E. R. (1955a). *Ned Kelly's sister Kate* (Unpublished manuscript). Forbes Family History Group and Forbes Historical Society Museum Collections, Forbes, NSW.
- Foster, E. R. (1955b, October 21). True story of Kate Kelly. *Forbes Advocate*.
- Foster, W. H. (1918, February 12). *Letter to A.I.F requesting son Frederick Foster's death certificate, Foster Family Collection*, Sydney.
- Foucault, M. (1982). *The archaeology of knowledge & the discourse on language*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books/Vintage.
- Foucault, M., & Gordon, C. (1980). The confession of the flesh: A conversation with Alain Grosrichard, Gerard Wajeman, Jacques-Alain Miller, Guy Le Gaufey, Doninique Celas, Gerard Miller, Catherine Millot, Jocelyne Livi and Judith Miller. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977* (pp. 194–227). New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Found drowned. (1898, October 18). *Forbes & Parkes Gazette*, p. 2.
- Højgaard, L., & Søndergaard, D. M. (2011). Theorizing the complexities of discursive and material subjectivity: Agential realism and poststructural analyses. *Theory & Psychology*, 21(3), 338–354.
- Jackson, S., & Shirley, G. (2006). *The story of the Kelly Gang*. Canberra, ACT: National Film & Sound Archive, NFSA.
- Jones, I. (2010). *Ned Kelly: A short life*. Sydney, NSW: Hachette Australia.
- Kelly, J. (1905). *The Kelly Gang: A salvationist's reminiscences. To the Editor of the Argus 24 November 1905*. Retrieved November 23, 2011, from [http://www.kellygang.asn.au/documents/N19s/905\\_11\\_24\\_1Argus.html](http://www.kellygang.asn.au/documents/N19s/905_11_24_1Argus.html)
- Metraform Production. (2009). *Ned Kelly's armour: A virtual reconstruction. Transcript*. State Library of Victoria, Melbourne. Retrieved November 12, 2011, from [http://www2.slv.vic.gov.au/collections/treasures/kelly\\_armour/kellyvideo.html](http://www2.slv.vic.gov.au/collections/treasures/kelly_armour/kellyvideo.html)
- McLean, E. (2003, February 21). *Interview with Dave Mathias*. Forbes, NSW: Forbes Heritage Project.
- McQuilton, J. (1979). *The Kelly outbreak 1878-1880: The geographical dimension of social banditry*. Melbourne, VIC: Melbourne University Press.
- Obituary: William Foster. (1946, August 9). *Forbes Advocate*, p. 2.
- Our Melbourne letter. (1881, May 14). *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, p. 3.
- Public Record Office Victoria. (2011). Statement of the accused: Ellen Kelly. *Ned Kelly*. Retrieved November 23 2011, from <http://prov.vic.gov.au/exhibitions/ned-kelly/the-kelly-story/string-bark-creek/statement-of-the-accused-ellen-kelly>
- Right Kate came here says friend. (1955, August 12). *Forbes Advocate*.
- Rigney, A. (2004). Portable monuments: Literature, cultural memory, and the case of Jeanie Deans. *Poetics Today*, 25(2), 361–396.
- Rigney, A. (2005). Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory. *Journal of European Studies*, 35(1), 11–28.
- Rodriguez, J., & Fortier, T. (2007). *Cultural memory: Resistance, faith & identity*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Röhle, T. (2005). Power, reason, closure: Critical perspectives on new media theory. *New Media & Society*, 7(3), 403–422.
- Tamboukou, M. (2008). A Foucauldian approach to narratives. In M. Andrews, C. Squire, & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing narrative research* (pp. 102–120). London, England: Sage.
- The Kelly Gang, Benalla. (1879, June 28). *Launceston Examiner*, p. 3.
- The Kelly Gang: Commencement of its career. (1905, November 20). *The Sydney Morning Herald*, p. 7.
- The Mansfield murderers. (1879, April 25). *Camperdown Chronicle*, p. 2.
- Tranter, B., & Donoghue, J. (2008). Bushrangers: Ned Kelly and Australian identity. *Journal of Sociology*, 44(4), 373–390.
- Tranter, B., & Donoghue, J. (2010). Outlaw culture: Bushrangers in *The Sydney Morning Herald. Australian Studies*, 2, 1–17.
- Veteran's tale of Kate Kelly. (1955, July 29). *Forbes Advocate*.
- Victoria. (1879, March 8). *The Mercury*, p. 1.
- Wendt, S. (2009). Constructions of local culture and impacts on domestic violence in an Australian rural community. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 25, 175–184.
- Wendt, S., & Hornosty, J. (2010). Understanding contexts of family violence in rural, farming communities: Implications for rural women's health. *Rural Society*, 20(1), 51–63.
- Zelizer, B. (2008). Journalism's memory work. In A. Erl, & A. Nunning (Eds.), *Cultural memory studies: An international interdisciplinary handbook* (pp. 379–387). New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter.

---

Received 01 August 2011 Accepted 17 February 2012