

The Queen Died, Colonisers Cried and the Walls Came Tumbling Down

Abstract: It is difficult to comprehend the overwhelming outpouring of emotion evidenced on social media following the passing of Elizabeth 11. It is not that this cannot be understood in the context of the dominant narrative. The difficulty lies in comprehending what the British monarchy has come to represent to so many. Fifty-six nations are still part of what is known as the Commonwealth. In Australia alone, over 500 Indigenous nations existed prior to the British Crown's invasion and its subsequent attempt to decimate those nations and claim British sovereignty. This paper seeks to understand how and why the dominant ideology of the Crown has manifest into a deluge of sadness, even despair. The paper will look at responses, interactions, and reactions by public figureheads. It will also demonstrate the sorrow felt by many Indigenous people at these responses themselves which to so many, betray a deliberate forgetfulness of what this event represents to them.

Keywords: *Indigenous, social media, colonisers, empire, colony, global solidarity*

“All the King's horses and all the King's men couldn't put Humpty together again”¹

1. Introduction

The falling walls of Jericho, a Palestinian city on the West Bank, provide an apt metaphor for this paper which seeks to examine the phenomenon of coloniser's grief displayed at the recent death of the monarch, Elizabeth 11. The bible story of Jericho's fall due to the claims of victory by potential colonisers has not been substantiated historically, nor have archaeological excavations corroborated the fall of the city.² According to the legend, God commanded the city be taken and all citizens be murdered as well as oxen, donkeys and sheep. The few who were spared, a prostitute and her family, were incorporated into the land of Israel.³ Many argue that this myth betrays the nationalist sentiment of the time. “The walls came tumbling down” has been used metaphorically by various churches to demonstrate the wrath of God,⁴ but also, and more relevant to this paper, it has been used as a motif for civil rights,⁵ worker's rights and in this instance, for what can be seen as the impending fall of colonial edifice: the colonisers' cries are the cries of grief but, as I will demonstrate, they are also indicative of the fear of the fall of empire. Such outpourings are the stuff of disbelief—and indeed, fascination to many—and as I will argue, cannot be solely attributed to Elizabeth's death. They are the ‘last hurrahs’ of the falling edifice of colonial control.

This paper takes much of its evidence from social media where the stark distinction between colonisers' responses and Indigenous peoples' responses to the death of Elizabeth 11 can be

¹ I draw from this ambiguous rhyme to illustrate vision of change and a possible fall of empire which, for many of my people, makes the riddle of “humpty dumpty” more meaningful. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humpty_Dumpty, accessed 2 November 2022.

² Jonathan Friedmann, “The Fall of Jericho as an Earthquake Myth”, *JBQ*, 48.3 (2020), 171-178.

³ Dudley Rutherford, “Walls Fall Down. 7 Steps from the Battle of Jericho to Overcome Any Challenge” (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 62.

⁴ Charles Bowden, *Jericho* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020).

⁵ Thomas R. Brooks, *Walls Come Tumbling Down. A History of the Civil Rights Movement, 1940-1970* (New York: Prentice Hall Direct, 1974).

scrutinised. Why is this so? It might seem obvious: many Indigenous people despise what the British monarchy represents and many settlers are proud monarchists. But there are variations within these categories that betray their ‘neatness’. The paper seeks to understand, explain and give weight to the idea that the walls of empire, despite the outpouring of sympathy and the sentimentality that has accompanied the Queen’s demise, are a source of extreme anxiety. I will also demonstrate that this death symbolises for many Indigenous people a sigh of relief, for ourselves, our peoples and our futures. I will focus specifically on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander responses to the death of the Queen across social media and particularly Twitter however, I will also draw on global conversations between colonised peoples and the event. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are avid social media users⁶ as are Indigenous peoples globally.⁷ Social media has provided Indigenous peoples around the world with a platform for global connectivity and solidarity in relation to the violent and ongoing impact of colonialism. For many, the Queen and the monarchy in general, as the most powerful colonial establishment, are ongoing symbols of violent dispossession. They represent the theft of lands and resources and the massacres of Indigenous peoples. The Crown is without doubt the architect of colonialism and the substantial beneficiary of the efforts of colonisers to eliminate Indigenous peoples.

2. For the Love of Elizabeth

Settler Australians have had a long love affair with the idea of the Queen. Whenever she visited the colony, no expense was spared in her honour. The Queen visited this continent on 16 occasions during her rule as “Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God Queen of Australia and Her other Realms and Territories, Head of the Commonwealth”.⁸ The first encounter was in 1954. It was the first time a reigning monarch visited these shores. The last encounter was in 2011. Back in 1954 when the Queen visited, the then prime minister Robert Gordon Menzies hosted a banquet at Parliament House in Ngunnawal Country (Canberra) in her honour. Menzies’ spoke about the “deep and warm and unaffected love” that Australians felt for “their Queen” and went on to declare, “on behalf of all Australian people, of all creeds, of all political parties, you may count on us. We are yours. There is nothing ambiguous about our loyalty or our will”.⁹ Menzies was an ardent monarchist and his flag-waving fervour played a significant role in establishing the monarchy in the hearts and minds of the already British-identified Australian public. He is the only Australian prime minister to have been awarded a knighthood. Ewan Morris drawing from print media accounts highlights the love of the Queen referring to it as “Queen-mania” and notes that millions of people turned out to get a hopeful glimpse of the monarch with some camped overnight to secure a good spot.¹⁰ It was estimated that an

⁶ See Bronwyn Carlson and Ryan Frazer, *Indigenous Digital Life. The Practices and Politics of Being Indigenous on Social Media* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021).

⁷ See Bronwyn Carlson and Jeff Berglund, *Indigenous Peoples Rise Up. The Global Ascendancy of Social Media Activism* (New Jersey: Rutgers U.P., 2021).

⁸ Giselle Baskin, “16 Visits over 57 Years. Reflecting on Queen Elizabeth 11’s Long Relationship with Australia”, *The Conversation* (12 September 2022), <https://theconversation.com/16-visits-over-57-years-reflecting-on-queen-elizabeth-iis-long-relationship-with-australia-170945>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁹ Cited in Ewan Morris, “Forty Years On. Australia and the Queen, 1954”, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 18.40 (1994), 1-13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1

astonishing 75% of Australians saw the Queen during that first visit.¹¹ During the early visits Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were not included and were strategically kept away.¹²

In 1970 the Queen again visited the colony for the bicentennial of James Cook's 'discovery' of this continent. The Queen and her entourage arrived at Kamay (Botany Bay) on the royal yacht *Britannia*. As Katrina Schlunke argues, this "'legal' landing added a performative gloss to the white Australian claim to possession of the continent that had been inaugurated by Cook".¹³ While the Queen watched the re-enactment, Aboriginal protesters across the bay at La Perouse lay funeral wreaths in the water to drift into royal view. They lined the beach and held signs with the names of Aboriginal groups from across the continent that had suffered greatly because of colonisation. On one side of the bay there was a celebration of the 'birth' of a nation, on the other there was mourning for death.¹⁴ When the Queen and her entourage left the bay onboard the *Britannia*, the Aboriginal protesters turned their backs on them. In 1986 the Queen visited again but this time to sign the Australia Act¹⁵ ostensibly drawing to an end the ability of the Crown to make laws for Australia. This may have indicated a change in direction where the monarchy was losing flavour. This is partially borne out by an increasing interest in republican debates.

2.1 #PlatinumJubilee

More recently, in February 2022 the world celebrated the Queen's 70th year on the throne. Colonisers were quick to use this occasion to further pay homage to their head of empire. Anthony Albanese had just been elected as Prime Minister and had begun publicly spruiking a commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for a voice to parliament.¹⁶ One of the new Prime Minister's first acts was to rename Aspen Island, the island in Lake Burley Griffin on Ngunawal Country (now known as Canberra), as Queen Elizabeth II Island.¹⁷ In a speech Albanese acknowledged the traditional owners of the land before moving quickly on to talk about the royal family. The ceremony included a twenty-one-gun salute and a Royal Australian Air Force flypast. In the UK, the four-day celebrations there cost taxpayers over 28 million pounds. Other nations in the commonwealth also contributed millions¹⁸. Media outlets framed the cost as being worth it for a celebration to honour all the hard work that the Queen had done on our behalf for decades. The royal family used social media platforms to send thanks to their loyal subjects. On Twitter for example, @RoyalFamily, the official Twitter handle

¹¹ See National Archives of Australia, "Queen Elizabeth II and Prime Minister Robert Menzies at a Function During the Royal Visit", <https://www.naa.gov.au/learn/learning-resources/learning-resource-themes/government-and-democracy/prime-ministers-and-politicians/queen-elizabeth-ii-and-prime-minister-robert-menzies-function-during-royal-visit>, accessed 2 November 2022.

¹² David Hill, *Australia and the Monarchy* (Sydney: William Heinemann Australia, 2015).

¹³ Katrina Schlunke, "Entertaining Possession. Re-Enacting Cook's Arrival for the Queen I", in Kate Darian-Smith and Penelope Edmonds, eds., *Conciliation on Colonial Frontiers. Conflict, Performance and Commemoration in Australia and the Pacific Rim* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 227-242, 227.

¹⁴ See Stephen Gapps, "Commemoration and Contestation at Kurnell", *Sea Museum* (11 May 2015), www.sea.museum/2015/05/11/commemoration-and-contestation-at-kurnell/, accessed 2 November 2022.

¹⁵ See Mark McKenna, "Shed the Queen [View of the Republic]", *Eureka Street*, 9.8 (1999), 24-29.

¹⁶ Bronwyn Fredericks and Abraham Bradfield, "'More Than a Thought Bubble...': The Uluru Statement from the Heart and Indigenous Voice to Parliament", *M/C Journal*, 24.1 (March 2021), <https://www.journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/2738>, accessed 2 November 2022.

¹⁷ Katherine Murphy, "Albanese Honours Queen Amid Jubilee Celebrations", *The Guardian* (2022), www.theguardian.com/australia-news/live/2022/jun/04/australia-news-live-update-anthony-albanese-labor-minimum-wage-coalition-peter-dutton-jubilee-energy-crisis-cost-of-living-gas?page=with:block-629ab1888f08c28a9854c537#block-629ab1888f08c28a9854c537, accessed 2 November 2022.

¹⁸ Jean-Paul Gagnon, "A Right Royal Rip Off. How Much Should Commonwealth Nations Pay for the Queen's Jubilee", *The Conversation* (2022), <https://theconversation.com/a-right-royal-rip-off-how-much-should-commonwealth-nations-pay-for-the-queens-jubilee-5227>, accessed 2 November 2022.

of the monarchy, posted a hand signed note from the Queen expressing gratitude.¹⁹ Settlers publicly announced their admiration for the Queen in articles, social media posts, television appearances and in every possible way to ensure that it was known that the Queen was held in the highest regard. Giselle Bastin published, “almost certainly, Elizabeth II’s reign as the stalwart, loyal, dutiful, and most cherished and admired of ‘Glorianas’ is one we are unlikely ever to see again”.²⁰ Endless celebratory Tweets using the hashtag #PlatinumJubilee flooded Twitter. In one, @robertjones1mil tweeted “Happy Platty Jubes everyone! I love the Queen so, I think if anything was to happen to her I would kill myself and many others”²¹ including 2 love heart smiley faces and the hashtag #PlatinumJubilee. Another, @MattThompson tweeted, “As I’ve said before I love the idea of an Australian head of state. But that doesn’t in anyway disrespect The Queen’s service. And wow, it’s so great to see soooo many people happy at the #PlatinumJubilee”.²² The tweets of support are endless and unvarying in their pronouncements of love and adoration. However, there are also vehement cries of dissent. In the US a Nigerian university professor posted on Twitter their objection to everything the monarchy represents referring to it as a “thieving raping genocidal empire”,²³ adding, “if anyone expects me to express anything but distain for the monarch who supervised a government that sponsored the genocide that massacred and displaced half my family and the consequences of which those alive today are still trying to overcome, you can keep wishing upon a star”.²⁴ On the same day as the royals were tweeting photographs and posts in honour of the platinum jubilee the hashtag #AbolishTheMonarchy was trending on Twitter.²⁵

3. Then the Queen Died

Just a short few months after the hype of the platinum jubilee, in September 2022, the world was informed via Twitter that the longest ‘serving’ monarch had died at age 96 after reigning for 70 years.²⁶ There were a range of reactions from Indigenous peoples from sorrow to criticism of the monarchy and what it stood for. Federal politician and Warlpiri woman Jacinta Nampijinpa Price posted on Facebook, “Thank you your Majesty Queen Elizabeth 11 may you Rest in Peace” and actor Yamatji man Ernie Dingo also posted on Facebook, “A beautiful Lady passed this morning, leaving wonderful memories all over the world, and especially these Mullewa²⁷ mob...walk her our Paddington and keep her spirit safe”.²⁸ Others however, were more critical. Aboriginal rapper Adam Briggs who self identifies as ‘Senator Briggs’ tweeted, “it’s amazing; the amount of wealth you can

¹⁹ See “Queen Elizabeth’s Platinum Jubilee. Celebrating 70 years on the Throne”, *Vanity Fair* (2022), <https://www.vanityfair.com/live/queen-elizabeth-platinum-jubilee-live-blog>, accessed 2 November 2022.

²⁰ Baskin, “16 Visits over 57 Years”.

²¹ Tobert (Rom) Jones, @robertjones1mil, “Happy Platty Jubes everyone!...” (Twitter post, 3 June 2022), <https://twitter.com/robertjones1mil/status/1532671143764688899>, accessed 2 November 2022.

²² Matt Thompson, @MattThompson, “As I’ve said before...” (Twitter post 5 June, 2022), <https://twitter.com/MattThompson/status/1533345307257278464>, accessed 2 November 2022.

²³ Chris Sutcliffe, “Social Media Platforms Reconsider Content Moderation Following the Queen’s Death” (2022), <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2022/09/12/social-platforms-reconsider-content-moderation-following-the-queen-s-death>.

²⁴ Uju Anya, @UjuAnya, “If anyone expects me to...” (Twitter 9 September, 2022), <https://twitter.com/UjuAnya/status/1567933661114429441>, accessed 2 November 2022.

²⁵ Erin Keller, “#AbolishTheMonarchy Trends of Twitter during Queen’s Platinum Jubilee”, *New York Post* (2 June, 2022), <https://nypost.com/2022/06/02/abolishthemonarchy-trends-on-twitter-during-queens-platinum-jubilee/>, accessed 2 November 2022.

²⁶ Sutcliffe, “Social Media Platforms”.

²⁷ Mullewa is a small rural town in Western Australia.

²⁸ See Tom Zaunmayr, “Indigenous Reaction to Queen Elizabeth 11’s Death from Australia and around the World”, *NITV* (2022), <https://www.nitv.com.au/indigenous-reactions-to-queen-elizabeth-iis-death-from-australia-and-around-the-world/>, accessed 2 November 2022.

accumulate when your family steals and enslaves half the world”.²⁹ Gunai Gunditjmara writer and activist Meriiki Onus tweeted, “Wow Indigenous people across the globe gonna take this hard. How will we cope?”³⁰ and Kalkadoon (Kalkutungu) lawyer Peta MacGillivray tweeted, “We’re not being insensitive, we’re decolonising your grief”.³¹ Many suggested that with the Queen’s passing it was a good time to reflect on the value of the monarchy and the harm the British empire has caused around the globe. Writer Karen Attiah tweeted, “Black and brown people around the world who were subject to horrendous cruelties and economic deprivation under British colonialism are allowed to have feelings about Queen Elizabeth. After all, they were her ‘subjects’ too”.³² Attiah went on to publish an article ‘We must speak the ugly truths about Queen Elizabeth and Britain’s empire’ and stated “for many, the British – by extension the queen – remain guilty for the nation’s historical crimes”.³³

The use of social media to speak directly to the public has been taken up by the monarchy in recent years arguably to appear in touch with the times and to attract a broader global audience. On the 8th of September (UK time) the royal family tweeted that “the Queen died peacefully at Balmoral” and the post included a black and white photograph of the Queen.³⁴ The tweet has over 2.5 million likes, 703.5k retweets and 260.1k quote tweets³⁵ demonstrating the reach of social media. Social media is an effective tool providing a means for anyone who has access to the technology to engage in public and often global conversations. Worldwide there are 396.5 million users on Twitter alone.³⁶ In an article by *Sensis*³⁷ the royal family’s use of social media was declared as existing for three primary reasons: firstly, to stay connected, secondly, to control the narrative and thirdly, to show personality. In the case of the Queen’s death, information emanating from royal sources is carefully curated to ensure that the Queen is remembered as a hardworking monarch who has served the people for seven decades.

The majority of people have never met the Queen and could not say they know her personally, nor are they likely to be able to articulate what this service entails. In general, the average person’s knowledge of the Queen is not likely to be grounded in fact and more likely to be shaped by mainstream and social media as is the case for all celebrity worship. In the case of the Queen and the royal family, to some degree, this is a different from other celebrity hero worship in that the royals for many represent a stabilising force that is ‘above’ the common threads of popular culture heroism; the queen *is* an institution. She *is* the establishment. So, it would seem from many responses that a love for her represents a love for what she is rather than a love for what she does. In the case of Diana Spencer’s death, the outpourings for her were largely attributed to her media constructed pleasant

²⁹ Senator Briggs, @Briggs, “It’s Amazing; the Wealth...” (Twitter 9 September, 2022), <https://twitter.com/Briggs/status/1567999931633508352?s=20&t=-AZbwrlcEXvmBg-nrSkOBg>, accessed 2 November 2022.

³⁰ Mariiki Onus, @Meriiki, “Wow Indigenous people across the globe...” (Twitter 9 September 2022), <https://twitter.com/Meriiki/status/1567976752441589761?s=20&t=tm39uZ1tuDHSOFU5EH3aLg>, accessed 2 November 2022.

³¹ Pete MacGillivray, @peta_ivy, “We’re not Being Insensitive...” (Twitter 9 September, 2022), https://twitter.com/peta_ivy_/status/1568026420999503872?s=20&t=UjHKsYcJNv-qo9FvbeGvAw, accessed 2 November 2022.

³² Karen Attiah, @KarenAttiah, “Black and Brown People around the Globe...” (Twitter 9 September 2022), <https://twitter.com/KarenAttiah/status/1567889946765148171>, accessed 2 November 2022.

³³ Karen Attiah, “We Must Speak the Ugly Truths about Queen Elizabeth and Britain’s Empire” *Washington Post* (2022), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/09/10/britain-colonial-brutalities-queen-elizabeth-death-commentary/>, accessed 2 November 2022.

³⁴ The Royal Family, @RoyalFamily, “The Queen Died Peacefully...” (Twitter 6 September, 2022), <https://twitter.com/RoyalFamily/status/1567928275913121792>, accessed 2 November 2022.

³⁵ @RoyalFamily, “The Queen Died Peacefully” (Twitter 9 September 2022), <https://twitter.com/royalfamily/status/1567928275913121792>, accessed 2 November 2022.

³⁶ Number of Twitter users worldwide. See <https://www.statista.com/statistics/303681/twitter-users-worldwide/>, accessed 2 November 2022.

³⁷ “3 Ways the Royal Family Uses Social Media (And What You Can Learn From Them)” <https://www.sensis.com.au/learn/how-the-royal-family-uses-social-media>, accessed 2 November 2022.

personality, her humanity, mothering and her philanthropic work. The Queen, as stated, is the establishment and represents to many a kind of order that has its roots in Empire and control and thus, commands for so many an almost unquestionable loyalty. For many Indigenous peoples, however, the significations of royalty are vastly different as we can see. The Queen represents to vast numbers across the globe a belief system grounded in faith and hope, to many a benevolent ruler that has been reliably ‘there’ for decades. She is the edifice, and the paradox of colonial rule.

So much can be gleaned from social media commentary as my research demonstrates. The tricky nature of social media however, means that the public and their responses cannot always be accurately monitored and controlled. Individual users can post, repost and comment at their will. In such collective spaces you will always see a multitude of opinions, although in the case of the Queen’s passing, perhaps less variations and more polarised standpoints are evidenced even within the scope of some variability. Information disseminated about the Queen is generally positive and upholds the impression of a benevolent, hard-working monarch who ‘fits’ with the designated identity bestowed on her by royalists, monarchists and many of those whose lives have been lived under her reign. The strength of the dominant narrative has been significant. Even people who profess to be devout republicans have expressed grief and sorrow at her passing. Former prime minister and republican, Malcolm Turnbull, for example, fought back tears in his response³⁸ which leads me to think that some people actually did see her as a person rather than simply an establishment figurehead. Or that expressions of sadness are a display of protocol perhaps.

3.1 *Colonisers cried*

Following her death, colonisers across the globe used all social media platforms to express their overwhelming grief and also, despite her age, a disbelief that their monarch had died. For many, the Queen has been the head of the empire for their entire lives – a 70-year reign on the throne. Leaders of colonised nations along with beneficiaries of the empire were quick to publicly express their alignment with the monarchy and their sorrow at the loss of their ruler. The US President Joe Biden stated, the Queen “defined an era...an age of unprecedented human advancement and the forward march of human dignity”³⁹ and the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated that, “her service to Canadians will forever remain an important part of our country’s history”⁴⁰ and Prime Minister of Aotearoa (New Zealand) Jacinda Arden referred to the Queen as “extraordinary” and noted that the Queen’s commitment to her role was “without question and unwavering”.⁴¹ Our own Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese stated that the Queen “was a rare and reassuring constant amidst rapid change” and announced a day of commemoration in the form of a public holiday.⁴² In each of these locations the Indigenous populations have been violently dispossessed from their homelands and subject to

³⁸ Samantha Maiden, “Malcolm Turnbull Fights Back Tears Remembering Queen Elizabeth II”, *News.com.au* (2022), <https://www.news.com.au/entertainment/celebrity-life/royals/malcolm-turnbull-fights-back-tears-remembering-queen-elizabeth-ii/news-story/cf8fb91521327ea202bc9bdfe3237d95>, accessed 2 November 2022.

³⁹ Brian Bushard, “Biden to Elton. Celebrities and World Leaders Mourn the Death of Queen Elizabeth”, *Forbes* (2022), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brianbushard/2022/09/08/irreparable-loss-biden-macron-trudeau-zelensky-other-world-leaders-mourn-death-of-queen-elizabeth/?sh=7c7ae5536c60>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Charlotte Graham-McLay, “New Zealand in a Period of Mourning as Jacinda Arden Pays Tribute to an ‘Extraordinary’ Queen”, *The Guardian* (2022), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/09/new-zealand-in-period-of-mourning-as-jacinda-arden-pays-tribute-to-extraordinary-queen>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁴² Courtney Gould, “Prime Minister Anthony Albanese Responds to the Queen’s Death”, *News.com.au* (2022), <https://www.news.com.au/entertainment/celebrity-life/royals/prime-minister-anthony-albanese-responds-to-queens-death/news-story/ef35736cbaa11147c11f259fc5719cac>, accessed 2 November 2022.

numerous massacres.⁴³ In each place, they have had their children stolen from them as part of a forced assimilation project, authorised by the state,⁴⁴ and despite treaties in some instances, remain overwhelmingly subjected to harmful policies and practices. For many Indigenous people, it is anathema to see and hear their elected leaders praise what to them is the primary source of the attempted destruction of their lands and cultures. It is also a notable fact that all four leaders mentioned hold politically ‘liberal’ values. However, we are well-trained and will understand that protocol demands a particular response despite its stinging bite to many Indigenous peoples. The dominant narrative must prevail!

In what has been referred to as “media madness”⁴⁵ and “media frenzy, rabid and ravenous”⁴⁶ the death of the Queen overtook all forms of media across the globe. It was planned and strategic – the idea being to promote a sense of global grief and to remind the world of the greatness of the empire and its continuity. As Knight has argued, “succession is part of the job”.⁴⁷ Collective grief for a person personally unknown to most is an interesting phenomenon that is common across social media. As Joshua Meyrowitz argues, “the evolution of communication media has fostered an increasingly intense sense of intimacy with those who would otherwise be strangers”.⁴⁸ Former premier of the state of Victoria (1992-1999) Jeff Kennett captured the dominant narrative when he tweeted “we wake up to news. The Queen has died. So sad, a life of service. For the vast majority of Australians she has reigned all their lives coming to the throne in 1952. She will always be remembered fondly. Thank you for the examples you set. Vale Queen Elizabeth”.⁴⁹ Many Indigenous and colonised peoples do not share the same grief nor love of the monarchy. Dreamtime Aroha @Dreamtime1 tweeted, “The only real Queen is your Mother don’t pretend to be upset for a stranger @AbolishTheMonarchy #Truth #Mumisqueen”.⁵⁰

4. Ungrateful Subjects

The ‘Abolish the Monarchy’ sentiment continued despite the death of the Queen. In fact, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have publicly expressed their support for abolishing the monarchy and asserting Indigenous sovereignty. For example, before the jubilee and death of the Queen, Greens Senator and DjabWurrung Gunnai Gunditjmarra woman Lidia Thorpe referred to the Queen as a “coloniser” during her oath of allegiance and pointed out that Aboriginal and Torres Strait

⁴³ See, for example, “Colonial Frontier Massacres, Australia, 1788-1930”, <https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/map.php>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁴⁴ See Ian Austen, “How Thousands of Indigenous Children Vanished in Canada”, *The New York Times*, (2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/07/world/canada/mass-graves-residential-schools.html>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁴⁵ Charlie Lewis, “Media Madness. How Elizabeth 11’s Death Has Dominated Global News Coverage”, *Crikey*, <https://www.crikey.com.au/2022/09/12/queen-elizabeth-death-media-madness/>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁴⁶ Euan Ritchie, “Why Did the Queen’s Death Receive Saturation Media Coverage While the Future of the Earth Goes Largely Ignored?”, *The Guardian* (2022), <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/commentisfree/2022/sep/16/why-did-the-queens-death-receive-saturation-media-coverage-while-the-future-of-the-earth-goes-largely-ignored>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁴⁷ Sam Knight, “‘London Bridge Is Down’. The Secret Plan for the Days After the Queen’s Death”, *The Guardian* (2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/16/what-happens-when-queen-elizabeth-dies-london-bridge>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁴⁸ Joshua Meyrowitz, “The Life and Death of Media Friends. New Genres of Intimacy and Mourning”, in Robert Cathcart and Susan Drucker, eds., *American Heroes in the Media Age* (Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, 1994), 64.

⁴⁹ Jeff Kennett @jeff kennett, “We Wake Up to News...” (Twitter 9 September, 2022), https://twitter.com/jeff_kennett/status/1567969481955352577, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁵⁰ Dreamtime Aroha, @Dreamtime1, “The Only Real Queen...” (Twitter 11 September, 2022), <https://twitter.com/Dreamtime1/status/1568883961874751488>, accessed 2 November 2022.

Islander peoples have never ceded sovereignty.⁵¹ Retribution was swift and Thorpe faced hostilities from settler politicians within parliament and from mainstream media. There are penalties for betraying dominant narratives. Others who expressed the same sentiment were also reprimanded. On hearing of the death of the Queen, Caitlin Moran, an Indigenous sportsperson posted on their own Instagram page a post that referenced the death of the Queen, “Today’s a good fkn day, uncle Luke announces his tour [Luke Combs country music singer], and this dumb dog dies Happy fkn Friday”.⁵² Moran was quickly reprimanded in an unprecedented game ban and significant fine of 25% of their salary for the season. The mainstream media were quick to demand punishment with one settler radio broadcaster calling the post the “most reprehensible thing ever seen”.⁵³ One could argue how astonishing this is given the Queen’s so-called support for democracy, but ‘free speech’ comes at a price for some. In another instance, Indigenous newsreader Narelda Jacobs stated that she was not going to mourn the Queen and called for the monarchy to apologise to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. She said, “the monarchy was a symbol of colonisation and nothing had been done to make up for that during the Queen’s 70-year reign”.⁵⁴ Jacobs was slammed in the mainstream media and by social media users and particularly those from the UK. In one post, @AngkorYok, tweeted “invading and taking possession of other people’s land is a fact of human history. Perhaps Narelda Jacobs should read the history of the world before she gobs off on a subject she obviously knows little of. Who was in Australia before the Aboriginals came? Conveniently forgotten”.⁵⁵ Peter Lynch @Peterly636565 tweeted in response, “Absolutely disgraceful, she should BE removed immediately, time to put these BLM [Black lives matter] infiltrated members where they should be, as one was advised NEVER employ them, trouble makers, all these token appointments should be stopped”.⁵⁶

On the Australian version of ‘Gogglebox’, the reality television show depicting people watching television, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have joined the couch for the first-time providing commentary on what has featured across on the various television channels over the week.⁵⁷ After the absolute saturation of coverage of the Queen’s death and subsequent funeral, the topic was featured on the show. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people commented on social media about the absence of any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander commentary about the coverage. Then Kevin Yow Yeh, one of the cast members tweeted, “We’re obviously disappointed much of our commentary about the queen’s passing wasn’t used on last night’s episode (and you know there were lots lols) but given that the idea of this place is predicated on the erasure of Black people and Black voice, I’m not

⁵¹ Josh Butler, “Australian Senator Calls the Queen a Coloniser While Being Sworn into Parliament”, *The Guardian* (2022), <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/aug/01/australian-greens-senator-lidia-thorpe-calls-queen-coloniser-while-being-sworn-into-parliament>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁵² Andrew Gamble, “Rugby League Player Banned after Calling the Queen a ‘Dumb Dog’ and Saying Death Was a ‘Good Day’”, *Mirror* (2022), <https://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/rugby-league/rugby-league-queen-elizabeth-ban-27986643>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁵³ See “NTLW Star Handed Ban After ‘Reprehensible’ Queen Post”, *News.com.au* (2022), <https://www.news.com.au/sport/nrl/nrlw-star-handed-ban-after-reprehensible-queen-post/news-story/1b2b5dace796852557ec749db24059af>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁵⁴ See “Don’t Ask Me to Mourn the Queens Death. Indigenous Television Presenter Hits Out at Critics”, *News.com.au* (2022), <https://www.news.com.au/entertainment/celebrity-life/royals/dont-ask-me-to-mourn-the-queens-death-indigenous-television-presenter-hits-out-at-critics/news-story/f48d3b0d9cb4b6d9b7897d371af3c5eb>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁵⁵ Cardano Cat, @AngkorYok, “Invading and Taking Possession...” (Twitter 12 September, 2022), <https://twitter.com/AngkorYok/status/1569298457596424195>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁵⁶ Peter Lynch @Peterly636565, “Absolutely Disgraceful, She Should BE Removed...” (Twitter 13 September, 2022), <https://twitter.com/Peterly636565/status/1569414652202983424>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁵⁷ See, “Meanjin Mob Make Dazzling Debut on Gogglebox”, *SBS* (2022), <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/meanjin-mob-make-dazzling-debut-on-gogglebox/erkx9gy1y>, accessed 2 November 2022.

surprised”.⁵⁸ Referencing the reaction to Caitlin Moran, Yow Yeh went on to tweet, “when she posted about the queens passing, we’re punished and reminded of our place here in the colony”. Demonstrations of responses to resistance to the dominant narrative are manifold and some, as indicated, exhibit the most blatant racism.

After being constantly informed by settler Twitter users about the Queen’s good character and the assertion that she had no political clout, Wiradjuri scholar Sandy O’Sullivan as host of the @IndigenousX⁵⁹ account tweeted that Indigenous people did not feel the same grief as white settlers and posted that “For those saying we should be magnanimous about the passing of the queen, a reminder that the queen inserted herself into the lives of Indigenous people here multiple times. She wasn’t a bystander to the effects of colonisation and colonialism, she was the architect of it”.⁶⁰ O’Sullivan again tweeted, “She had influence over the ‘commonwealth’. Her wealth is not just ceremonial, and it was not acquired passively. It was built on the pain and suffering of Indigenous peoples. That was the plan all along and that’s the plan that she was an agent of her whole career”.⁶¹ In response from settlers, O’Sullivan received untold death threats and threats of physical violence including rape. Their home address and phone number was published along with where to find them in their workplace. Not one or two but thousands of posts. O’Sullivan spoke about the response at a recent conference and stated:

There were 26 million impressions on the first tweet. 86 people questioned how I could be a Professor, 235 people said I should lose my job. 15 people tweeted my home address and 1,892 people wrote something overtly transphobic or racist or—unsurprisingly both. 83 people suggested universities should be defunded and 4 people said I should be ‘put down’ (using those exact words). 6 said I should be assaulted. There were hundreds of slurs and many suggested that we were lucky we were colonised by the British because they were kind. Many suggested if we weren’t colonised we wouldn’t even have the wheel.⁶²

O’Sullivan went on to say, “that was just the public tweets. I also received death threats, and other threats via email and phone”.⁶³ O’Sullivan, a colleague, shared some of the emails with me. I will not give space to them here in any detail, except to say that the content is perhaps the most racist, sexist and transphobic vitriol imaginable. In not citing them explicitly, I am deliberately minimising their power; suffice to say that the emails regurgitate every racist slur possible and demonstrate that in 2022, there still exists a deep-seated hatred for Aboriginal people. This loathing is writ large when we dare to express dissent.

O’Sullivan’s workplace also received a formal complaint from a Twitter user demanding consequences for their comments. Daring to critique the monarchy—the highest symbol of white supremacy for example, brings with it swift punishment for Indigenous peoples. Technology-facilitated abuse is inseparable from the context of settler colonialism.⁶⁴ This means that some

⁵⁸ See Thread from Kevin Yow Yeh, @kevinyoweh, “We’re Obviously Disappointed...” (Twitter thread, 16 September 2022), <https://twitter.com/kevinyoweh/status/1570661789876236288>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁵⁹ @IndigenousX is a rotating Twitter account that is generally hosted by a different Indigenous person weekly.

⁶⁰ Sandy O’Sullivan as host of @IndigenousX, “For Those Saying We Should...” (Twitter thread 9 September 2022), <https://twitter.com/IndigenousX/status/1567990400736178176>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Sandy O’Sullivan, keynote at the Australian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (dassh) Conference, Griffith University, (2022) <https://dassh.edu.au/20th-anniversary/2022-conference-program/?fbclid=IwAR3wdhYpYNGohDahWPri5vZN1R8woIkzFfZpDG14F2IHE6deT-vrctnLnU>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Bronwyn Carlson and Madi Day, “Love, Hate and Sovereign Bodies. The Exigencies of Aboriginal Online Dating”, in Anastasia Powell et al., eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Gendered Violence and Technology* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 181-201.

experiences, particularly those of abuse and violence as they relate to the ongoing impacts and legacies of colonial violence are shared in common among Indigenous people. As these experiences are not only racialised but also gendered⁶⁵, they disproportionately impact Indigenous women and LGBTQIA+ people. If we dare to dissent, we are scripted as ungrateful, treasonous and unworthy citizens. Even in discussions on mainstream television's current affairs programmes that did include responses from Indigenous commentators following the Queen's death, hosts and commentators themselves were often at pains to mention her 'good points' prior to stating any negative comments regarding what her death represented for them. It is likely that only acquiescing contributors to the topic were selected.

4. The Walls Came Tumbling Down

I am comforted knowing that sooner or later, all destructive systems destroy themselves – history shows it cannot be any other way. Toxic empires either change or they collapse. I might not see it in my lifetime, but I know it will happen.⁶⁶

The #AbolishTheMonarchy movement is gaining momentum. The dissent has been growing for some time. When Albanese announced a public holiday and a day of mourning for the Queen, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people expressed their outrage. Meerooni musician Kaylah Truth tweeted “So it appears that they do, in fact, understand what a Day of Mourning is and can action a national holiday for it with the click of a finger. Funny that”.⁶⁷ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been calling for a Day of Mourning since 1938 where Indigenous activists gathered on January 26th to protest against colonisation and the ongoing oppressive treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.⁶⁸ In response to Albanese's wilful disregard for our history and our suffering, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people instead publicly called for a 'Day of Protest' encouraging people to take to the streets in protest and demanding the monarchy be abolished. Wiradjuri Badu Island Yinaa scholar and activist Lynda-June Coe tweeted the below poster (Image 1) stating “Day of Protest, Gadigal Land” with an emoji pointing to the flyer.⁶⁹ On Albanese's 'day of mourning' thousands of people marched in the streets across most major cities calling for the end of the monarchy and drawing attention to the ongoing violence of settler colonialism including Aboriginal deaths in custody and demanding the return of stolen lands.⁷⁰ Coe has expressed disappointment that in the “suffocating coverage” of the Queen's death, the government and the broader public have missed the opportunity to engage in truth-telling and discussions about the on-going effects of colonisation. She stated that the Queen's death, “could have been an opportunity for not only the government but all Australians to reckon with our colonial past through a process of truth-telling”.⁷¹ Coe critiques the

⁶⁵ Madi Day, “Indigenist Origins. Institutionalizing Indigenous Queer and Trans Studies in Australia”, *Trans Studies Quarterly*, 7.3 (2020), 367-373.

⁶⁶ Mykaela Saunders, “Everywhen: Against ‘The Power of Now’”, *Griffith Review*, 76 (2022), 115-125.

⁶⁷ Kaylah Truth, @kaylahtruth, “So It Appears That They...” (Twitter 11 September 2022), <https://twitter.com/kaylahtruth/status/1568767828119146500>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁶⁸ Stephen Powell, “William Cooper's Legacies”, *Teaching History*, 56.1 (2022), 39-44.

⁶⁹ Lynda-June Coe, @LyndaJune1, “Day of Protest...” (Twitter, 18 September 2022), <https://twitter.com/LyndaJune1/status/1571406932757585920>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁷⁰ “Protests Make Australia's ‘Day of Mourning’ for Queen”, *Aljazeera* (2022), <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2022/9/22/protests-mark-australias-day-of-mourning-for-queen>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁷¹ Lynda-June Coe cited in Aleksandra Bliszcyk, “Missed Opportunity”. The Media Should Have Talked about Colonisation More after the Queen's Death”, *Pedestrian* (2022), https://www.pedestrian.tv/news/media-queens-death-colonisation/?utm_campaign=later-linkinbio-pedestriantv&utm_content=later-29762206&utm_medium=social&utm_source=linkin.bio, accessed 2 November 2022.

coverage stating that from all mainstream sources, “there’s are real emphasis on the Queen as a person and not really talking about the Crown as an institution and the violence it’s inflicted on not just First Nations but other minority groups around the world”.⁷²

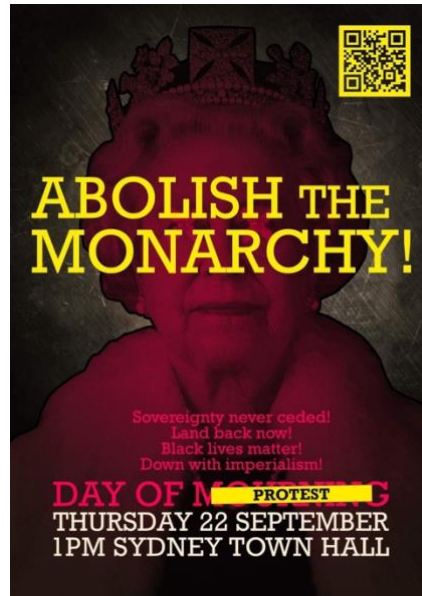


Fig. 1: Day of Protest poster shared on Twitter by @LyndaJune1

Across Twitter, Indigenous and other colonised peoples joined together in solidarity denouncing the monarchy and all it stands for. Drawn together by hashtags, #BlackfullaTwitter and #IrishTwitter rejoiced in the end of the Queen’s reign. Gunditjmara, Bindal, Yorta Yorta activist Tarneen Onus @tarneen tweeted, “#Blackfullatwitter and #Irishtwitter is pretty lit today” with a fire emoji.⁷³ The tweet includes an image of two arms flexing with hands joined. One arm dark in colour with ‘Blackfulla Twitter’ banner across it and the other fair in colour with ‘Irish Twitter’ banner across it. Another Aboriginal twitter user, Blacky J @BundjalungBud tweeted, “step up #BlackfullaTwitter, #IrishTwitter is coming in hot” with a fire emoji and reposted Dublin Bhoy @dublincelticfan’s post of Tallagat stadium in Dublin where fans at a football match were chanting “Lizzies in a box”.⁷⁴ The use of the hashtags such as #BlackfullaTwitter operates in a way to bring Indigenous sociality “to the surface of mainstream visibility”⁷⁵ but this is not the main objective for use. Instead, the hashtags enable Indigenous users to “intentionally signal their cultural affiliations to a like-minded audience”.⁷⁶ In this case two groups who have been colonised by the British have become affiliated.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Tarneen Onus, @tarneen, “#Blackfullatwitter and #Irishtwitter...” (9 September, 2022), <https://twitter.com/tarneen/status/1568047446676361217>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁷⁴ Black J, @BundjalungBud, “Step up #BlackfullaTwitter, #IrishTwitter...” (Twitter 9 September, 2022), <https://twitter.com/BundjalungBud/status/1567996205334134784>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁷⁵ André Brock Jr., *Distributed Blackness* (New York: New York U.P., 2020), 81.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

The hashtag #AbolishTheMonarchy has been used along with #NotMyKing as thousands express their dissatisfaction with the monarchy and the impending coronation of Charles. Symon Hill tweeted, “Charles Windsor is due to be crowned king... We are expected to accept him as head of state because of who his ancestors were. This is absurd anachronistic #coronation with be an assault on democracy, equality and human dignity. He’s #NotMyKing”.⁷⁷ The public are drawing attention to the political and economic instability, the global pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the cost of supporting the British nobility. Boris Johnson was forced to step down as prime minister amid a rash of political scandals including supporting an ally accused of sexual misconduct to hosting parties at Downing Street in violation of COVID lockdown laws.⁷⁸ The cost of supporting the monarchy who the public are viewing as more and more irrelevant is the focus of many social media conversations. One social media user posted, “Imagine part of your wages going towards the coronation of a guy who told his mistress he wants to be her tampon...and also paying for said mistress to become queen. Oh & this guys brother is a pedophile [sic]. Stay classy, UK. #NotMyKing #AbolishTheMonarchy #RacistBritishMedia”.⁷⁹ Charles’ brother Andrew has drawn significant media attention since being associated with convicted paedophile Jeffrey Epstein⁸⁰ and the out-of-court settlement for the sexual assault lawsuit against him in which the Queen was said to have contributed a significant amount of money.⁸¹ The monarchy have also been accused of racism and the way in which they have treated Meghan Markle who married Prince Harry in 2018. Meghan who identifies as “biracial” claimed she had experienced racism from within the royal family.⁸² In the infamous interview with celebrity Oprah Winfrey, Harry and Meghan claimed it was primarily racism that drove their decision to distance themselves from the royal family.⁸³ While many were outraged at such an accusation it is clear that long before Meghan arrived in the royal family, members of the family were known for their racist comments. Charles’ father for example, the late Prince Phillip made many public racist comments,⁸⁴ sneakily passed off as ‘gaffes’ by the British press, always at pains to paint him as a bit doddering rather than racist.

There is growing attention to the opulence of the monarchy including the jewellery worn at official events. Across social media it has been pointed out that the riches have been stolen from South Africa and India and also former colonies including Australia. Many are posting a meme of a young Elizabeth posing during her coronation where she wears the imperial State Crown, Sovereign’s Sceptre with Cross and Sovereign’s Orb, all said to be priceless and stolen from colonised nations as part of the

⁷⁷ Symon Hill, @symonHill, “Charles Windsor is Due to Be...” (Twitter 12 Oct 2022), <https://twitter.com/SymonHill/status/1579883708454440960>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁷⁸ Adela Suliman et al., “Boris Johnson Resigns as Party Leader”, *Washington Post* (2022) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/07/boris-johnson-resign-live-updates/>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁷⁹ Laney, @laneymakesstuff, “Imagine Part of Your Wages...” (Twitter 13 October 2022), <https://twitter.com/laneymakesstuff/status/1580384546414940160>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁸⁰ Karen Rosenbaum et al., “Jeffrey Epstein. Filthy Rich. Sexual Assault Survivors and the Justice System”, *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 49.1 (2021), 144-145.

⁸¹ Victoria Ward and Josie Ensor, “Queen to Help Pay for 12m Prince Andrew Settlement”, *The Telegraph* (2022), <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/royal-family/2022/02/15/queen-help-pay-12m-prince-andrew-settlement/>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁸² Kimberley Ducey and Joe R. Feagin, *Revealing Britain’s Systemic Racism. The Case of Meghan Markle and the Royal Family* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

⁸³ Cady Lang, “The Core Message from Megan and Harry’s Oprah Interview. Racism Drove Us from the Royal Family”, *Times* (2021), <https://time.com/5944613/meghan-markle-oprah-racism/>, accessed 2 November 2022.

⁸⁴ Sarah Al-Arshani, “Prince Phillip Had a Long History of Racist and Problematic Language Stretching Back 40 Years”, *Insider* (2021), <https://www.insider.com/prince-philip-long-history-racist-problematic-language-2021-4>, accessed 2 November 2022.

colonial expansion. Sadé @sadenochill tweeted, “That palace and crown jewels are monuments to genocide. Tear it all down & return the wealth immediately”.⁸⁵

5. Conclusion

This paper began as an exploration, in many ways, a thoughtful attempt to make sense of the nonsensical. In doing so, it has illuminated, through the excessive lamenting and public displays of grief, the anxiety that is tucked away regarding the ‘fall of Jericho’, the beginning of the end of the British monarchy. This may take decades. However, the visibility of social media responses suggests that the walls are indeed crumbling as scandal leaks into the royal façade and world events continue to challenge the power and authority of colonial rule. This may be a statement of optimism on my part, (albeit shared by many Indigenous peoples), and given the evidence supporting the Crown and the repercussions for those who don’t, it is still clear that the monarchy retains a stronghold on its so-called empire states. However, there is an increase in the ‘writing on the wall’ that suggests the outpouring is not simply about the monarchy but about what it continues to represent for those who have been brutally dispossessed by its might.

⁸⁵ Sadé – John’s sister, Fundamentally Black, @sadenocill, “That Palace and Crown Jewels...” (Twitter 9 September 2022), <https://twitter.com/Sadenochill/status/1567936235246866432>, accessed 2 November 2022.