

An Afterword

Lynette Russell

It is a rare joy to be asked to comment on a collection of papers as thoroughly important as those contained in this volume. Although I might be quick to characterise these as ‘labour history’ they are, in fact, much more than that; while most have a historical element to them, all contributions are also deeply and completely contemporary, topical and political. History—good and meaningful history—must, I believe, embrace interdisciplinarity. To understand Indigenous peoples, their historical specificity and their varied responses to contact and colonialism, we need to engage with historical texts, ethnography, anthropology, material culture studies as well as politics. As an experiment in interdisciplinary studies, these authors weave an intellectual dialogue across, between and within the disciplines of history, ethnography, anthropology, human geography, cultural and Indigenous studies. By taking a regional Pacific-wide approach, *Labour Lines and Colonial Power* offers up both parallels and significant contrasts between Pacific Islander and Indigenous Australian labour mobility experiences.

Transnational and multi-site histories,¹ along with studies in Indigenous labour and mobility, have recently experienced something of a resurgence.² Building on foundational early work, such as that by Clive Moore, Regina Ganter and, more recently, Julia Martinez and Adrian Vickers, John Maynard and my own offerings, the maritime industries have provided

1 I am thinking here of Wolfe, *Traces of History*, and others works including Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*.

2 Carey and Lydon, *Indigenous Networks*; Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific*; Chappell, *Double Ghosts*; Shineberg, *The People Trade*. See also contributors in Standfield, *Indigenous Mobilities*.

the most visible location for studies of native labour and mobility.³ The chapters in *Labour Lines* take this starting point and move beyond it in exciting, surprising and revelatory ways.

I am going to resist reiterating the content of each chapter; however, I do note that, taken in its entirety, these authors speak to and with each other, showing the power and importance of a collected volume of essays. Those of us in universities are being actively discouraged from producing edited collections, especially ones published by ‘local’ presses as we strive for new nebulous targets of ‘excellence’ and ‘impact’. This collection is a perfect demonstration of why this is a flawed idea. Emerging out of a symposium hosted by Deakin University, the essays here have all the hallmarks of having been thoroughly discussed, workshopped, digested and reformed. It is telling that there is a mixture of senior scholars and up-and-coming early career researchers. Even more importantly, there is a diversity of approaches, with Indigenous and settler writers complementing, contrasting and challenging each other. Perhaps the greatest strength of this approach is the time periods covered: the past, the recent past and the present.

Too often the concept of Indigenous labour history is male focused—images of hard male bodies doing physically demanding work not fit for a ‘white man’ predominate. As Haskins and Scrimgeour have powerfully shown us, from 1900 to the mid-twentieth century, domestic labour in Australia was widely regarded as not *real* labour, as it was conducted by women and often women of colour.⁴ It is revealing that, within this collection, serious scholarly attention is paid to women’s labour as well as men’s and the role gender plays is considered and developed. *Labour Lines and Colonial Power* is a potent reminder of how a collection can be so much more than the sum of its parts. Like the labour it describes, the essays here are wide ranging, complex and layered.

Finally, while I resisted the urge to describe individual contributions, I would like to comment on one essay: Chapter 3, “‘Boyd’s Blacks’: Labour and the Making of Settler Lands in Australia and the Pacific”, by Tracey Banivanua Mar. This is undoubtedly the last time any of us will read new and fresh insights from Tracey, highlighting her brilliance and the tragedy

3 Moore, ‘Revising the Revisionists’; Ganter, *The Pearl-Shell*; Maynard, *Fight for Liberty*; Maynard, ‘Transcultural/Transnational’; Russell, *Roving Mariners*; Martinez and Vickers, *The Pearl Frontier*.

4 Haskins and Scrimgeour, “Strike Strike, We Strike”, 89.

of her loss. As ever, she elucidates the complexity of transnational histories and demonstrates the intersectionality of the early colonial labour trade. With her eye firmly on Pacific Islander experiences of trade, labour and mobility, she takes the reader on an insider's journey presented within an activist-historian's framework. This chapter is extremely important; indeed, it is set to be a classic piece of historical literature. It serves as a stark reminder of how vital it is to have Indigenous/Pacific Islander and/or 'native' scholars speaking to, and 'talk'ng up' to, our collective histories.⁵

Bibliography

- Banivanua Mar, Tracey. *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Carey, Jane and Jane Lydon, eds. *Indigenous Networks: Mobility, Connections and Exchange*. London: Routledge, 2014. doi.org/10.4324/9781315766065.
- Chappell, David. *Double Ghosts: Oceanian Voyagers on Euroamerican Ships*. London, England: M. E. Sharpe, 1997.
- Edmonds, Penelope. *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in 19th-Century Pacific Rim Cities*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010.
- Ganter, Regina. *The Pearl-Shellers of Torres Strait: Resource Use, Development and Decline, 1860s–1960s*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994.
- Haskins, Victoria and Anne Scrimgeour. "Strike Strike, We Strike": Making Aboriginal Domestic Labor Visible in the Pilbara Pastoral Workers' Strike, Western Australia, 1946–1952'. *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 88 (2015): 87–108. doi.org/10.1017/S0147547915000228.
- Martinez, Julia T. and Adrian Vickers. *The Pearl Frontier: Indonesian Labor and Indigenous Encounters in Australia's Northern Trading Network*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015. doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824840020.001.0001.
- Maynard, John. *Fight for Liberty and Freedom: The Origins of Australian Aboriginal Activism*. Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007.

5 I am borrowing the term 'talk'ng up' from the hugely influential Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman*.

- . ‘Transcultural/Transnational Interaction and Influences On Aboriginal Australia’. In *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective*, edited by Ann Curthoys and Marilyn lake, 195–208. Canberra: ANU E Press, 2005.
- Moore, Clive. ‘Revising the Revisionists: The Historiography of Immigrant Melanesians in Australia’. *Pacific Studies* 15, no. 2 (1992): 61.
- Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. *Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000.
- Russell, Lynette. *Roving Mariners: Australian Aboriginal Whalers and Sealers in the Southern Oceans, 1790–1870*. New York: SUNY Press, 2012.
- Shineberg, Dorothy. *The People Trade: Pacific Island Laborers and New Caledonia, 1865–1930*. Honolulu: Center for Pacific Island Studies, University of Hawai’i Press, 1999.
- Standfield, Rachel. *Indigenous Mobilities: Across and Beyond the Antipodes*. Canberra: ANU Press and Aboriginal History, 2018. doi.org/10.22459/IM.06.2018.
- Wolfe, Patrick. *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*. London: Verso Books, 2016.

This text is taken from *Labour Lines and Colonial Power: Indigenous and Pacific Islander Labour Mobility in Australia*, edited by Victoria Stead and Jon Altman, published 2019 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.