Preface

This volume includes four fascinating articles each exploring indigenous history in rich, new ways. Tracey Banivanua Mar’s analysis of three moments of Indigenous protest in Tahiti, Victoria and New Zealand presents a new transnational history of indigenous political agency in the 1840s. Their significance, she argues, lies not in whether they succeeded or failed in preventing the spread of European colonisation, but instead in the way in which the various indigenous leaders – Queen Pomare, Billibellary, and the Maori Confederacy – adapted Imperial discourses, for instance on ‘protection’ and ‘sovereignty’, to articulate their own demands, and thus reveals a shared, transnational political consciousness. In his study of British explorers’ encounters with Indigenous people in Queensland, Michael Davis analyses the interplay and connections between Indigenous knowledge and western ideas about the local environments. Whilst acknowledging that tension, misunderstanding and conflict marked these early cross-cultural encounters, his research also reveals that such encounters resulted in trade, exchange, and communication, and produced new forms of colonial knowledge about natural ecology and Indigenous economies. Liz Conor offers a fresh new perspective on our understandings of cross-cultural gender relations by tracing the ‘black velvet’ trope which characterised settler ideas about Aboriginal women in Northern Australia, and finding that it exclusively pertained to white men’s sexual relations with Indigenous women. By contrasting the alarmist colonial discourses which demonised Asian-Aboriginal relations, Conor finds that the ‘black velvet’ trope affirmed Anglo-Australian male perceptions of proprietary ownership over the female Aboriginal body. Lastly, John Maynard’s study of Percy Haslam, an amateur enthusiast of the Awabakal language and culture, provides new insights into the way in which unique individuals such as Haslam, shaped by their own personal histories with Aboriginal communities, amassed important archives at a time when professional academics had little interest in Indigenous culture, which, in this instance, enabled the revitalisation of the local language. In the Notes and Docs section Colin Dyer has contributed a new resource for researchers by translating the nineteenth-century French traveller, Eugène Delessert’s observations of Aboriginal people and culture, based on his visit to Sydney in 1844–45.

Finally, Volume 37 includes Karen Hughes’ obituary of the highly-respected elder Thomas Edwin Trevorrow who was instrumental to both the Ngarrindjeri and broader South Australian communities.

Shino Konishi