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Introduction

JAMES BEATTIE
The Centre for Science in Society,
Victoria University of Wellington;
Research Associate, Centre for Environmental History,
The Australian National University;
Senior Research Associate, Faculty of Humanities,
University of Johannesburg;
Research Associate, Environmental Research Institute,
University of Waikato

It’s my pleasure to introduce this special issue on gender and environment, guest co-edited by Ruth Morgan and Margaret Cook. The special issue is a timely and important reminder of the need for more sustained gender analysis in environmental history. As well, the issue provides useful case studies and tools for analysing gender and environment. This includes an expert analysis of gender and environmental history scholarship (Ruth Morgan and Margaret Cook, ‘Gender, environment and history: New methods and approaches in environmental history’) and a superb analysis of the fabrication of a quilt, and its implications for gender, colonialism and environment (Vanessa Nicholas, ‘The naturalisation of settler colonialism by a flowered Irish quilt in Upper Canada’). It extends to a study of masculinity and femininity in rural Waikato (Meg Parsons and Karen Fisher, ‘Hegemonic masculinity and femininity in the ‘backblocks’ of the Waikato and King Country, 1860s–1930s’), an article on the use of archives to reveal untold stories of emotion and masculinity (Margaret Cook, ‘Emotional challenges to masculinity in the 1930s Callide Valley closer settlement, Australia’) and ends with a fascinating discussion of recent migrant women and environment (Heather Goodall and Latifa Hekmat, ‘Talking to water: Memory, gender and environment for Hazara refugees in Australia’).

Rebecca Priestley is stepping down as associate editor of the journal. I thank her for her work and support. I also thank the support of the Centre for Science in Society, Victoria University of Wellington, which funded the publication of the journal from 2017–20. I welcome one new editorial board member—Courtney Addison, from Victoria University of Wellington, who as an anthropologist will help to broaden the interdisciplinary skill set of the journal.

Unfortunately annual funding for the preparation, formatting and copyediting for the journal has stopped. This means the journal will have to seek other funding sources. Please contact me if you have any suggestions or wish to donate towards publication costs.
The current funding issue with *International Review* points to wider problems in academic publishing, funding and access, evident even pre-COVID-19. Post-COVID-19, funding for open-access journals in an era of austerity is now a pressing issue. This is all the more so since the same institutions often fund research to the tune of tens of millions of dollars and then pay millions of dollars for databases to access research they have themselves already funded. For example, a recent study by the Council of New Zealand University Librarians found that New Zealand university libraries spent NZ$65 million on ‘subscriptions to electronic resources in 2017’ alone. On top of that expense, the authors of the report estimated that researchers and funders spent NZ$2.16 million in 2017 to have articles processed for publication.1

**Call for papers**

I particularly encourage submissions on topics related to history and energy, the atmosphere and water, especially in relation to Africa, South America and Asia. Please also contact me if you are interested in guest editing a special issue.

**Acknowledgements**

I am indebted to the support of so many in making this publication possible. *International Review of Environmental History* is supported through the Centre for Environmental History and The Australian National University. Its former Director, Professor Emeritus Tom Griffiths, has enthusiastically backed this venture from the outset, and its current director, Associate Professor Ruth Morgan, has carried on this tradition. In 2013, Professor Bruce Clarkson, formerly Director of the Environmental Research Institute, University of Waikato, granted me the time to devote to planning and preparing the journal by giving me teaching buy-out. I am also grateful for the funding and intellectual support for the journal provided by University of Waikato Vice-Chancellor, Professor Neil Quigley. I thank the journal’s Associate Editors and supportive and active Editorial Board for their support and acknowledge the assiduous copyediting and formatting of Dr Austin Gee.

James Beattie, Editor
Dunedin, March 2021

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Gender, environment and history: 
New methods and approaches in 
environmental history

RUTH A. MORGAN
The Australian National University, Canberra

MARGARET COOK
University of the Sunshine Coast, Sunshine Coast

Abstract

We are far from the first, and expect we will not be the last, to wonder at the paucity of research on women, gender and sexuality in (Anglophone) environmental history. To borrow from Virginia Scharff, who was writing in 1999, environmental history still has a ‘sex secret’. For all the insights of feminist scholarship, science studies, queer studies, women’s history, gender history and histories of sexuality that have accumulated since then, many environmental historians still seem to find ‘forest fires more fascinating than cooking fires’, at least in Australia and the United States. Yet historical studies of women’s garden making, environmental and animal welfare movements, domestic labour, knowledge making, ‘alternative’ environments and mountaineering (just to name a few areas of dynamic scholarship) show that women have indeed been agents of environmental change in ways that either conformed to or contested contemporary gender and sexual expectations. Arising from the ‘Placing Gender’ workshop held in Melbourne in 2018, this collection brings together four contributions that demonstrate different approaches to undertaking gender analysis in environmental history. Focusing on non-Indigenous women and men in the Anglo-world from the mid-nineteenth century, some adopt new tools to excavate familiar terrain, while others listen closely to voices that have been rarely heard in the field. Recasting the making of settler places in terms of their gendered production and experience not only enriches their own environmental history, we argue, but also broadens the historian’s enquiry to encompass the other lands implicated in the production of settler places.

Keywords: environmental history, gender history, colonial history, historical geography

As we write, the British Government has embarked on an ambitious vaccination program in an effort to curb the worst COVID-19 outbreak in Europe. Living in the first country to begin vaccinating its population, over 100,000 Britons number amongst the estimated 2.25 million people around the world who have died as a result of contracting the disease. Following the path of disasters and diseases past, COVID-19 has exposed and exacerbated the nature and extent of all manner of socioeconomic
inequalities, such that some people are bearing the brunt of the pandemic more heavily than others.1 Environmental historian and COVID-19 survivor Marco Armiero puts it bluntly: ‘the entire epidemic apparatus unveils the truth about a system built to reproduce privilege through normalising injustice’.2 In the United Kingdom and the United States, for example, racial and environmental injustices have rendered some peoples of colour particularly vulnerable to the disease,3 with research among the latter finding that the largest average percentage increase in numbers of deaths compared with previous years among Hispanic people (53.6 per cent) and the smallest among whites (11.9 per cent).4 Public health responses to the pandemic, meanwhile, have shone a spotlight on the weaknesses of a precarious labour force, as well as the classed, gendered and racialised nature of paid and unpaid health care, domestic labour and sanitation. Furthermore, economic stress has combined with restrictions on movement outside the home to increase gender-based violence, as evidenced by increased demand for support services.5

Historians counsel that COVID-19 is no ‘natural’ disaster. Rather, it is of our own making. As the environmental historian Liza Piper reminds us, ‘We cannot lose sight of the coronavirus as part of us: our relationships with one another—unequal, divergent, and connected—are the “nature” that is integral to this and every pandemic’.6 Although the precise origins of the disease are not yet certain, environmental historians can already see how the forces of globalisation, urbanisation, industrialisation and industrial agriculture have rendered us increasingly interconnected—not just with each other through trade and travel, but also with animals and the atmosphere through pathogens and pollution.7

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1 The authors are grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their feedback, which has strengthened this essay. For an Australian perspective, see K. Holmes, ‘Generation COVID: Crafting History and Collective Memory’, Griffith Review 71 (2021), www.griffithreview.com/articles/generation-covid.


What and how we breathe, long concerns for residents of industrialising regions and countries, had already become a cause for alarm across southern and eastern Australia as bushfires and smoke swept across the continent in the Savage Summer of 2019/20. Those who could escape with their families to unaffected areas, while many more made do with masks and sought refuge indoors. Even as the embers cooled across nearly 19 million hectares of land, the largest area burnt in a single recorded fire season in eastern Australia, the human and ecological toll continued to mount along the familiar fault-lines of gender, race, class and geography. The bushfires disproportionately affected Aboriginal people in New South Wales and Victoria, for example, where they comprise nearly 5.4 per cent of the people living in fire-affected areas, but only 2.3 per cent of the total state populations. Across the scorched continent, some among the affected were yet to be born, as bushfire smoke is detrimental to maternal health, the placenta and the unborn child. It continued to circle the globe weeks after the fires were finally extinguished in early March.

COVID-19 and the Australian bushfires feature among the array of ‘hotspots’ that are proliferating and escalating across the globe in the Anthropocene. We point to the bushfires simply because we both live and work in Australia; we could just as easily have described 2020’s fires in the Amazon rainforest, the Siberian heatwave, or flooding and landslides in Vietnam and Cambodia. Just as postcolonial, Marxist and feminist scholars have argued, these hotspots have made a lie of this so-called ‘Age of Humans’ for, as Rob Nixon has noted, ‘We may all be in the Anthropocene but we’re not all in it the same way’.

Critiques of the misnomer of the Anthropocene abound, premised on the historical structures, systems, inequalities and possibilities that the term elides and obfuscates. Although the resulting litany of alternative ‘-ocenes’ are both generative and speculative, the Anthropocene itself has a ‘silver lining’, as the geographer Laura

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Pulido suggests, because it ‘forces us to reckon with history’. For Pulido, the uneven racial geography of the Anthropocene demands closer historical analysis, while the feminist anthropologist Anna Tsing questions the single universalising narrative or timeline that the Anthropocene implies. These critiques align with those who highlight the dominance of male ‘Northern voices’ in planetary science circles, such that the Anthropocene might be more accurately dubbed the ‘Manthropocene’. In this ‘hegemonic Anthropocene narrative’, Stefania Barca argues, ‘the forces of production (science and industrial technology) are maintained as the only possible tool for understanding the errors and for repairing them. The system itself is not under question; its gender, class, spatial and racial inequalities are either invisible or irrelevant: no paradigm shift is necessary.’ Whether environmental historians consider the Anthropocene an analytically useful device for their work is a moot point: the field of environmental history, as J. R. McNeill reminds us, is a ‘very big tent’. What we are drawn to as environmental historians is the way these wider debates about the Anthropocene’s nomenclature and framing reflect disciplinary challenges and conversations within the field regarding representation, practice and structures of power. Three decades after Carolyn Merchant’s provocative 1990 article on gender and environment in the Journal of American History, the field of environmental history is reckoning with its overwhelmingly white, heteronormative, male canon. Again.

We are far from the first, and expect we will not be the last, to wonder at the paucity of research on women, gender and sexuality in (Anglophone) environmental history. To borrow from Virginia Scharff, who was writing in 1999, environmental

history still has a ‘sex secret’. For all the insights of feminist scholarship, science studies, queer studies, women’s history, gender history and histories of sexuality that have accumulated since then, many environmental historians still seem to find ‘forest fires more fascinating than cooking fires’, at least in Australia and the United States. Scharff’s wit points to the scales, spaces, practices and subjects that continue to dominate historical analysis, in which the kinds of ecological transformations that women past have wrought are deemed too mundane, too small, too feminine to be significant. Yet historical studies of women’s garden making, environmental and animal welfare movements, domestic labour, knowledge making, ‘alternative’ environments and mountaineering (just to name a few areas of dynamic scholarship), show that women past have indeed been agents of environmental change in ways that either conformed to, or contested, contemporary gender and sexual expectations.

Attending to gender and environmental history, however, is not only a matter of adding women to the scholarship, or, more precisely, recovering and reintegrating women as historical actors and agents into the stories we tell about the past. Just as environmental historians and others have long understood ‘nature’ as an historical category, and the environment as ‘everywhere’, so too ‘the work of gender in history is never done’, as Susan Schrepfer and Douglas Sackman reminded us a decade ago.\textsuperscript{25} Simply put, all environments and (human) bodies are gendered, as are environmental knowledge, experiences and behaviours. As Scharff observes, ‘Gender, the bundle of habits and expectations and behaviours that organises people and things according to ideas about the consequences of sexed bodies, is a crucial, deep, and far-reaching medium through which we encounter nature’.\textsuperscript{26} We have only to turn to recent research in the field of environmental psychology that observed the ways in which particular environmental behaviours are construed as either masculine or feminine in Western contexts.\textsuperscript{27} Typically, behaviours that aim to minimise environmental impacts are coded feminine, and are thus undesirable to men who, in order to avoid ‘effeminacy’, seek to perform hegemonic masculinity.

This is familiar territory. Environmental historians have shown how Progressive Era men in the United States struggled to reconcile their ‘feminine’ environmental concerns, which critics had associated with an extension of women’s domestic responsibilities, with upholding their masculine authority.\textsuperscript{28} Similarly, others have investigated the ways in which white male elites (and boys) used hunting, farming, ornithology and other outdoor activities to perform their masculinity in North America, British India and the Andes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries. Enslaved African American men undertook masculine activities of hunting and fishing, as well as cultivating the small garden plots allocated to families by slaveholders. Settler men forged their own strain of masculinity in the rugged Australian Mallee, while whites performed their ‘manly vitality’ in the exploitation of California’s Salton Sea and Mexico’s Huasteca. The harsh environments of the poles likewise provided a stage for muscular performances of Western manhood.

In the case of the Arctic, women writers and audiences crafted these men’s exploits into heroic narratives, while urban elites overlooked the quotidian labours of washerwomen in Helsinki’s frigid winters. That environmental behaviours and


environments are gendered invites further analysis of the historical roots and impacts of such perceptions, and underscores the relevance of and need for the study of gender and environment in the past to understand how this legacy informs the present and future.

In addition to these historical analyses of the gendering of identities and environments, environmental historians have also turned to the materiality of the human body and the ways its very corporeality is both historically and ecologically contingent. Such embodied approaches to environmental history recognise the ‘body’s historicity’ as a ‘material and narrated’ entity that defies what Christopher Sellers describes as the ‘tacit boundaries of our field—between body and environment, human and nonhuman nature’.34 In colonial contexts, human bodies themselves became barometers of environmental change, which could manifest in gender and reproductive anxieties among settler populations.35 While some environments were wanting, others could be restorative, as Michael Lansing found in conservationist schemes to rehabilitate the emasculated bodies of disabled veterans after the Great War.36 Meanwhile, Nancy Langston’s work probes the porosity of human and animal bodies, and the hormonal impacts of the proliferation of industrial chemicals since the 1930s.37 Among her concerns are the implications of the resulting gender transformations on reproductive health, particularly for women and wildlife, although queer and trans-feminist scholars reject the suggestion of biological or ‘natural’ heteronormativity.38 That such an ecological understanding of human and animal bodies emerged after the Second World War in an Anglophone context of narrowly defined gender roles has not been lost on environmental historians. Rachel

Carson looms large in this work, not least in terms of her contribution to the post-war environmental movement as a woman scientist and the gendered reception of her publications, particularly *Silent Spring*.39

Focusing on gendered bodies also aligns with the field’s interest in labour and work as the means by which humans relate to, make sense of and impact the environment.40 Where work happens, the nature of that work, and the very bodies that work are all gendered. Take Scharff’s account of unloading her groceries, for instance: a familiar and mundane chore that connects her gendered domestic labour to the gendered processes of industrial agriculture.41 Having consumed the food on Scharff’s table, her family’s bellies become joined to a web of commodities, themselves produced by gendered bodies (human and other-than-human), in gendered industries, in gendered environments.42 Of those commodities, dairy milk in particular has invited gendered analysis, ranging from maternal care and child-rearing, to its production, and the very dairy cows themselves.43 Gendered nouns and pronouns for animals have also been found an effective means of obscuring the industrial nature of twentieth-century livestock production, or a potential hindrance to the progress of medical research that depends on animal testing.44

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Gender and sexuality not only shape historical relations between humans and the environment, but also intersect with the dynamics of race, class, place and culture. Examining the contours of these power dynamics in environmental history, as Traci Brynne Voyles suggests, invites more complex and contingent historical narratives of environmental change than those of either triumph or decline.45 '[W]hen we refocus our attention to include women, the picture … becomes more richly textured, more reflective of the lived experience', Marsha Weisiger contends in her study of Navajo pastoralism during the New Deal era.46 Michael D. Wise, for instance, shows how the regulation of livestock butchery at the turn of the twentieth century, which had long been the province of Blackfeet women, allowed administrators of the US Office of Indian Affairs 'to further supervise the Blackfeet's assimilation toward Anglo-American standards of gender and labor'.47 These examples alone confirm that in the field of environmental history, gender can and does do much more than produce an ‘endless rediscovery that humans have often made nature female’, to paraphrase Richard White's 2001 cautionary insight on the potential contributions of ecofeminism to the field.48

Among the reasons that Scharff suggests for the relatively scant attention to women in environmental history, let alone questions of gender and sexuality, are the limitations of historical sources. Some have endeavoured to ‘cover their tracks’ for all manner of reasons, while others have left little trace. Micah Muscolino, for instance, recovers the gendered dimensions of soil and water conservation in 1950s China through oral history interviews with the elderly women who lived through these campaigns.49 Consider too the contemporary social prejudices that ensure some groups are more represented than others in public records, as Peter Boag and Valerie Korinek both found in their searches for historical evidence of gender and sexual transgressions in the Pacific Northwest and western Canada during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.50 In light of the field’s growing attention to other-than-humans and their historical agency, Scharff muses: ‘Women, unlike woodchucks, have the power of speech, but environmental historians have not listened very well’.51

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45 Voyles, ‘Man Destroys Nature?’, 204.
47 M. D. Wise, Producing Predators: Wolves, Work and Conquest in the Northern Rockies (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 59.
Nearly two decades on, the essays in this collection do listen. Using material culture, oral histories and government archives, they listen carefully to non-Indigenous women and men past to examine their gendered experiences of place-making in the temperate settler lands of Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and Canada from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. Settler nations all, but the particular places being made range from the rural frontier to the suburban home. So too, the subjects of these environmental histories differ widely, not only in terms of their gender identities, but also their ethnicity, ability, age, language and culture. Spanning two centuries, these essays demonstrate the fluidity of gender and sexuality over time, and the ways in which non-Indigenous women and men shaped places, and the ways these places shaped them in return.

It was not our intent for the contributions to this collection to focus on non-Indigenous women and men in settler colonies; we encourage environmental historians to engage more closely with how environmental relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples have been historically gendered, sexualised and raced, and the ways in which gender and sexuality has shaped Indigenous place-making. On a related note, we approach this collection on gender and environmental history as a set of potential avenues for further exploration and engagement, not as a prescriptive agenda for our colleagues in the field. As Joan Scott noted in her 2008 reflection on her landmark essay: ‘questions about gender can be asked and answered only in specific contexts … like “class” it is most useful when it points the way to specific investigations of meanings, whether of social relationships or rhetorical proclamations’.  

These themes of gender, race and settler colonial place-making were the subject of lively discussion at the ‘Placing Gender’ workshop, which was held in Melbourne on Wurundjeri country, and in Bendigo, on Dja Dja Wurrung country, in December 2018. Convened by Katie Holmes and Ruth Morgan, and supported by the Rachel Carson Center, the Australian Research Council, Monash University and La Trobe University, the workshop was a response to what we saw as the relatively underdeveloped nature of gender analysis in environmental history and the lack of attention given to it at major environmental history meetings in Europe and North America during 2017 and 2018. These concerns were raised on the White Horse Press blog in 2017, with posts from Verena Winiwarter and Ruth Morgan, and the workshop offered a means to revitalise this area of enquiry with contributions from Australasia, North America, the United Kingdom, India and China.

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Following Haraway, the contributors take a feminist approach to their sources, understanding them as material objects themselves that are politically and culturally constituted in particular places and times. The quilt, the survey form and the oral testimony analysed in these essays are artefacts of situated environmental knowledge that connect their production, form and contents to a wider web of power relationships and meanings that inform their consumption and interpretation. They contain multitudes: the personal, intimate and embodied narratives of experiences and contestations of the gendered dreams and failures of imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, migration and the nation-state. Consequently, they reveal less about past material environments and environmental change than about the meanings their authors created from their own gendered experiences of making place in settler lands.

Drawing on geography’s spatial insights, each contribution examines the gendered ways in which non-Indigenous women and men negotiated their own identities and belonging in unfamiliar places. In making homes for themselves in settler lands, these migrants were engaging in what Heather Goodall has elsewhere described as a ‘continuing relationship, in memory and day-to-day connections, with home countries as well as with new homelands’. Such a grounded ‘translocalism’ is temporal as well as spatial, and mobile as well as fixed, allowing for ‘places [to] travel with the peoples through whom they are constituted’, as Hugh Raffles suggests. It follows then that the places studied in the essays here are necessarily relational, material manifestations of particular social and environmental relations that accumulated over time and space.

In making places for themselves, the subjects of these studies participated in and contended with prevailing settler geographies of inclusion and exclusion. For both humans and more-than-humans, belonging and inclusion in settler space and the settler polity are always contested categories mediated by social relations. As Adele Perry observes of nineteenth-century British Columbia, ‘Gender is where the abiding bonds between dispossession and colonisation become most clear. Notions and practices of manhood and womanhood were central to the twinned businesses of marginalising Aboriginal people and designing and building a white society’.

56 See D. Massey, Space, Place and Gender (Hoboken: Wiley, 1994).
peoples haunts the non-Indigenous polity, whose own fears of exile inform historic and ongoing anxieties about (non-white) immigration and reproduction, thereby challenging the project of belonging for unwelcome newcomers.59

Of the papers shared in late 2018, this collection brings together four contributions that demonstrate different approaches to undertaking gender analysis in environmental history. Some adopt new tools to excavate familiar terrain, while others listen closely to voices that have been rarely heard in the field. We begin in nineteenth-century colonial Ottawa, where Vanessa Nicholas draws on the insights of art history to demonstrate the ways in which settler women’s handicrafts might be read as gendered products of colonial power. Focusing on an embroidered coverlet or quilt, Nicholas contends that the floral decoration reflects a picturesque interpretation of unfamiliar lands that elides the Indigenous dispossession fundamental to British settler colonialism. Furthermore, she shows how the domestic object was a product of, and embedded in, the processes of industrialisation and trade that pulsed through the British Empire. By interpreting the quilt’s production as the manifestation of the appropriation of land and resources, Nicholas demonstrates the ways in which settler women were implicated in the processes of settler colonialism in British North America.

The collection then turns to Aotearoa New Zealand, where Meg Parsons and Karen Fisher examine the gendered transformation of the Waipā River in the Waikato and King Country districts of the North Island from the 1860s through to the 1930s. Focusing on the role of Pākehā (settler) women, Parsons and Fisher use both archival and visual sources, as well as oral histories, to understand their efforts to remove and remodel the indigenous forests and wetlands. In doing so, they challenge long-standing historical narratives that position Pākehā settler men as the sole agents of the radical environmental changes that followed formal British colonisation in 1840. Through the lens of hegemonic masculinity and femininity they demonstrate how Pākehā gender norms informed the ways in which Pākehā men and women in this riverine area perceived their local environments, their own and others’ day to day activities, and how they interacted with human and more-than-human communities.

Across the Tasman Sea, Margaret Cook analyses the challenges faced by settler farmers in central Queensland’s Callide Valley in the 1930s. Her archive is the correspondence of nearly 1,000 rural landholders who submitted their personal accounts to the 1934 Commission of Inquiry into the closer settlement scheme’s

progress. Written mostly by men, as well as a handful of widowed women, these forms and letters offer Cook an insight into the gendered experience of agrarian settlement in an unfamiliar environment, the subtropics of northern Australia. For most of the correspondents, the reality of farming tested their ability to meet the prevailing expectations of rural settler manhood as a stoic provider who could subdue the land. Sharing a similar approach to Parsons and Fisher, Cook studies the how material conditions of the Callide Valley circumscribed the farmers’ performance of hegemonic masculinity to their personal detriment.

The final contribution to this collection examines the gendered relationships of refugees to place and environments in urban and rural Australia in the twenty-first century. Drawing on interviews with Afghani Hazara refugees in Sydney and Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, Heather Goodall and Latifa Hekmat consider the ways in which their experiences constitute a ‘gendered flight’, owing to the starkly different nature of the journeys that women and men face once they leave their places of origin. Their article’s focus is the gendered experience of forced migrancy in relation to water, both in terms of the informant’s flight as well as in terms of making place and homes in south-eastern Australia. These accounts reveal the enduring significance of water to the Hazara narrators for whom it represents danger, survival, grief and purification, and sustains the social and affective ties between peoples, places and the past.

The approaches and methods demonstrated here point to how some environmental historians are excavating the power relations of the past to reveal the gendered ways in which non-Indigenous peoples have shaped environments, and been shaped by them in return, as they sought to belong in the settler lands of Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and Canada since the mid-nineteenth century. Recasting the making of settler places in terms of their gendered production and experience not only enriches their own environmental history, we argue, but also broadens the historian’s enquiry to encompass the other lands implicated in the production of settler places. Revitalising gender analysis in environmental history reflects an ethics of scholarship attentive to the importance of the past to addressing increasingly urgent questions of environmental justice in a time of planetary crisis.

**Acknowledgements**

The articles in this special issue are drawn from a workshop held on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri peoples in Melbourne, and of the Dja Dja Wurrung peoples at La Trobe University’s Bendigo campus in December 2018. Co-convened by Katie Holmes (La Trobe University) and Ruth Morgan (then at Monash University), the workshop was titled ‘Placing Gender: A Workshop on Gender and Environmental History’. The editors are grateful for the productive and friendly
conversations that arose from the meeting, and Ruth thanks Margaret for joining her in co-editing this set of essays. This gathering of scholars from around the world was only possible with the generous support of the Centre for the Study of the Inland, La Trobe University; the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, Ludwig-Maximilians University, Munich; the Australian Research Council (DE160101125); and the Faculty of Arts, Monash University. The editors also acknowledge the generous contribution of referees whose feedback strengthened the individual articles and the special issue as a whole. Finally, the editors thank James Beattie, Austin Gee and the School of History, The Australian National University, for supporting the publication of this special issue.
The naturalisation of settler colonialism by a flowered Irish quilt in Upper Canada

VANESSA NICHOLAS
York University, Toronto

Abstract

Studying an embroidered quilt that Mary Morris (1811–97) made as a young girl in Ireland four years before she transported it to Upper Canada in 1829, this article argues that the floral decorative traditions imported by British women to British North America had a political dimension. The quilt, which is a patchwork of printed cottons surrounding panels of white cotton embroidered with representations of flowers, birds, insects and hunting scenes, combines embroidered motifs inspired by Indian chintz textiles with printed cotton fabrics of English manufacture featuring floral designs. As such, Morris’ flowered quilt represents the imperial economy that enabled settler colonialism in Canada. This is significant because it suggests that the seemingly mild-mannered domestic objects prized or made by British women in Upper Canada contributed to a visual and material culture that was invested in destabilising the environmental and cultural sustainability of Indigenous life.

Keywords: homecraft, textiles, environmental art history, Canada, Ontario

I recognise that many Indigenous nations have long-standing relationships with the territories upon which I live and work. The area known as Tkaronto has been in the care of the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Huron–Wendat, and the Métis. It is now home to many Indigenous peoples. I acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region.

In Canada, it is customary to begin meetings, gatherings, public events and ceremonies with a territorial or land acknowledgement, which involves recognising the Indigenous peoples who were the traditional stewards and residents of the land on which you stand as well as the Indigenous peoples that inhabit the territory today. I open this article with an acknowledgement of my position as a white woman living in Toronto (Ontario, Canada) in part because my case study is concerned with how the visual and material cultures that were transplanted by British newcomers to Upper Canada in the nineteenth century helped to naturalise settler
colonial attitudes towards the land just north of the Great Lakes and St Lawrence river.1 During the period of British settlement in this region, which began in the late eighteenth century, Indigenous and Western European artists affirmed their connection to the land in incommensurable terms.2 In the words of the art historian Jolene Rickard, who belongs to the Tuscarora Nation:

from an Indigenous perspective, the genre of landscape painting is one of the conceptual and visceral tools of colonization. If landscape paintings mark a nation’s relationship to place, I argue that the Indigenous peoples of the Americas have the deepest understanding of this space, as molded in clay, carved in stone, stitched in animal hides, woven in fibres, etched on our bodies and embedded in the environmental as mounds or medicine wheels.3

Studying an embroidered quilt that Mary Morris (1811–97) made in Ireland four years before transporting it to Upper Canada in 1829 (Figure 1), this article argues that the decorative traditions imported to British North America by British women were as complicit in the project of settler colonialism as the landscape painting tradition insofar as their motifs and materials are infused with narratives of power and empire.

Initially, recent revisionist critiques of historical landscape painting in North America gave me reason to wonder whether Morris’ quilt presents a more equitable and ecological view of the natural world. For example, while her quilt depicts natural subjects, particularly flowers and animals, it does not make use of perspectival space or horizon lines, artistic devices that arguably produce the illusion of an open expanse that one cannot help but imagine occupying.4 We might therefore regard the quilt’s formal properties as incompatible with settler colonialism, which describes the dislocation of Indigenous peoples from their traditional territory by a considerable number of foreigners who claim the land as their own.5 Nevertheless, my research leads me to conclude that Morris’ quilt befits settler colonialism because its exotic floral embroideries and printed cotton fabrics make clear references to the British Empire and its industrial strength. Citing the history of Indian chintz in British consumer culture and its eventual reproduction by British manufacturers at the beginning of the nineteenth century, I argue that Morris’ quilt contains global material histories that had real implications for the environmental and cultural

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1 The Province of Ontario has previously been referred to as Upper Canada (1791–1841) and Canada West (1841–67).
5 Thomas, Possessions, 9.
The naturalisation of settler colonialism by a flowered Irish quilt in Upper Canada landscapes in south-eastern Ontario. I do not attribute mal-intent to Morris, and I do not draw conclusions about her interior life. Rather, I regard her quilt in relation to its global context and understand her artistic references in relation to British imperialism. In so doing, I put forth the possibility that the floral decorations favoured by British women in Upper Canada aestheticised British efforts to supplant indigeneity.

Figure 1: Mary Morris, quilt (1825), cotton and linen, 200 x 185 cm.
Source: Canadian Museum of History, 79-237, IMG2009-0063-0131-Dm.
Not much is known about Morris, whose embroidered quilt is now a distinctive object in the Canadian Museum of History. Her quilt was previously owned by the Canadian historian Ruth McKendry, and it figures in a number of her publications. McKendry describes Morris as a skilled needlewoman born with a physical handicap that prevented her from walking, and she hazards that Morris made the coverlet shortly after arriving in British North America. McKendry does not specify where Morris came from. More details of Morris’ biography can be found in Susan Warren’s history of South Crosby (1997), a township in Ontario’s historical Leeds County. Warren makes mention of Morris and her ‘exquisite’ quilt. According to Warren, Morris settled with her widowed mother, Mary Morris (1775–1867), and her brother, Thomas Morris (1809–93) on Lot 6, Concession 4 in South Crosby in 1829, a full four years after she signed and dated her completed quilt: ‘Mary Morris Aged 14 1825’. Presuming that the Morris family migrated directly to Leeds County, the quilt must have been completed before they left for British North America. Morris’ mother’s monument at the St John Anglican Cemetery in Lyndhurst, Ontario, is inscribed with her birthplace, County Carlow, Ireland, and it is safe to assume that this is where Morris finished her quilt as a young teenager in 1825. Given their date of arrival in Leeds County, we can contextualise the Morris family within the last in a wave of Anglo-Irish Protestants from south-eastern Ireland to settle in south-eastern Ontario between 1816 and 1833. This demographic gravitated towards the available if challenging terrain in and around Leeds County in part because approximately 15 Protestant families from Counties Wexford and Wicklow had settled in the area between 1809 and 1811.

Morris’ quilt would have been amongst the few personal effects that her family brought to Upper Canada. Given the level of detail in this quilt and the fact that Morris made it as a young teenager, it was likely to have been intended for her trousseau. The exceptional condition of the quilt may be attributed to the fact that Morris never married, continuing to live on her family’s homestead with her brother,
his wife and their children until she died at the age of 85.\textsuperscript{13} It is most likely that the quilt remained stored, though Morris may have used it gently as a decorative coverlet on her bed. The quilt's centrally planned design builds outward from a decorative square of white cotton, which she embroidered with a number of fanciful floral motifs using wool threads and a combination of chain, stem, seed and satin stitches. Her focal point is a potted plant flowering with four different types of blossoms, which is surrounded by a symmetrical arrangement of embroidered flowering plants, trees and floral sprays, some of which have attracted butterflies and peacocks. Morris frames her centrepiece with a thin perimeter of patchwork that is bordered by a band of white cotton featuring more of her needlework. Deer hunting parties run up its vertical sides, and flowering plants grow along its horizontal sides. Beyond this band of embroidered cotton are four concentric squares of pieced cotton. Of the nine different cotton fabrics represented in her piecework, eight are printed, and seven feature floral or vegetal designs. Morris' quilt combines embroidered motifs inspired by Indian chintz textiles with cotton fabrics of English manufacture printed with floral designs.

I speculate that this quilt was treasured as a sign of British culture and authority in the Morris family's Upper Canada home. British settlers were known to bring select sentimental luxuries with them to Upper Canada. For example, the well-known author Susanna Moodie carried her mother's blue and gold Coalport tea service across the ocean in 1832 only to have it break in a sleigh accident in the winter of 1834.\textsuperscript{14} More relevant to our case study is the fact that Moodie's sister and brother-in-law, Catharine Parr Traill and Thomas Traill, brought at least one luxury textile item with them when they moved to Upper Canada in 1832. In her autobiography, \textit{The Backwoods of Canada} (1836), Traill recalls receiving Indigenous women at her homestead who wished to admire 'a gay chintz dressing-gown belonging to my husband'.\textsuperscript{15} Indian chintz became a popular material for men's morning gowns in Europe sometime during the third quarter of the seventeenth century and remained fashionable for men's and women's fashions alike throughout the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{16} There is a men's banyan or informal robe made from imported Indian chintz in the Victoria and Albert Museum collection that dates to the third quarter of the eighteenth century, and it is possible that Traill's robe also dates to this period.


\textsuperscript{14} Charlotte Gray, \textit{Sisters in the Wilderness: The Lives of Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill} (Toronto: Viking, 1999), 96.

\textsuperscript{15} Catherine Parr Traill, \textit{The Backwoods of Canada} [1836] (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1997), 121.

He was born in 1793, making it conceivable that he was in possession of a banyan owned by his father. According to his wife, her Indigenous neighbours petitioned her to sell or trade the dressing gown, but she ‘resolutely refused to part with it’. In addition to their association with home and family, tea services, chintz robes and embroidered quilts would have been valued as signifiers of British culture in an unfamiliar, harsh landscape.

This is significant because it suggests that the seemingly mild-mannered domestic objects prized or made by British women in Upper Canada contributed to a visual and material culture that was invested in undermining Indigenous environmental and cultural sustainability. Understanding the insidious dimension assumed by Morris’ quilt in the Canadian context requires that we further establish the discord between the understandings of land and nature held by Indigenous and European settler societies in North America’s north-east during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant that I cited in my land acknowledgement above refers to a peace agreement made in 1701 between the Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee First Nations within the St Lawrence River valley and Great Lakes region that exemplifies the distinctively Indigenous outlook on territory and resources. The arrival of Europeans in this region in the seventeenth century produced an intensified fur trade that led to nearly a century of conflicts between Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee residents over access to hunting grounds. In the summer of 1701, approximately 1,000 delegates representing more than 30 First Nations from across the St Lawrence River valley and Great Lakes regions met in Montreal to ratify the peace treaty predicated on a metaphor that had long been used by those present to describe agreements concerning shared hunting grounds, the dish with one spoon. According to the Indigenous scholar Hayden King, who belongs to the Beausoleil Nation:

this pragmatic arrangement recognized that even as distinct nations, we can share the same territory. But we need to acknowledge our mutual obligations to ensure the dish is always full … there are no forks or knives at the table with which we can stab each other, just a spoon that we share.

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19 Lytwyn, ‘A Dish with One Spoon’, 210, 217.
This communal understanding of land and resource management is represented in Indigenous artistic traditions, which tend to centre the body in a cosmology of vertical space and circular time that binds all living and non-living things. Take, for example, the edge of a beaded skirt produced and worn in the mid-nineteenth century by Caroline G. Parker (1826–92), who belonged to the Tonawanda Band of the Seneca Nation within the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. In her contribution to the exhibition catalogue for ‘Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic’, which opened at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2015, Rickard describes Parker’s skirt as ‘perhaps the single most influential example of the Haudenosaunee relationship to the earth’. To illustrate this claim, she stresses that the domes created by white and blue beaded lines on the inside edge of the Parker’s skirt refer to a multitude of earth-based practices and beliefs. Firstly, Haudenosaunee women were traditionally the primary farmers in their communities and they planted their most important crops (corn, beans and squash) together in mounds, a sustainable cropping system known as intercropping. It is possible that the three ovate shapes contained within the domes or mounds on Parker’s skirt represent these three crops, which were referred to as the ‘three sisters’. This dome shape likely also symbolises Turtle Island, referring to a creation story common amongst many traditions within the Algonquian and Iroquoian language groups wherein the North American continent was formed on the back of a giant turtle. This skirt thus exemplifies the ways that Indigenous art and design were employed to maintain corporeal and cosmological ties to ancestral homelands.

According to King, settler populations were incapable of observing the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant: ‘As settlers began to proliferate in what would become the Great Lakes area, they too were invited to eat from the dish. But over time their collective appetite eroded the principles of mutual autonomy, humility and sustainability.’

The inability of settlers to understand the codes and ethics of shared territory can be attributed to their view of land in terms of power and commerce. This understanding of territory and resources is represented by European artistic traditions, in particular the landscape genre. In her contribution to the ‘Picturing the Americas’ exhibition catalogue, the art historian Ruth Phillips attributes the political utility of landscape painting in nineteenth-century North America to its perspectival representation of space, which she claims corresponds with Western concepts of ownership, horizontal space and linear time. By design, then, landscape paintings were antithetical to

23 Ibid., 118.
24 Ibid.
25 King, ‘First Nations Crisis is About Land’.
traditional Indigenous relationships to land, which were informed by cosmologies that centred reciprocity, defined space vertically and observed natural cycles. In the same exhibition catalogue, the art historian Peter John Brownlee further stresses the role that landscape painting in the Americas played in establishing an entitlement to natural resources amongst those who held private property: ‘landscape painting in the Americas glorified and helped to facilitate the extraction of natural resources in pictures that accorded with the aesthetic tastes and entrepreneurial spirit of the landowning classes’. Brownlee cites W. J. T. Mitchell’s Landscape and Power (1994), an edited volume of essays that establishes the historical alignment of landscape painting with the economic interests of landowners.

The critical treatment of North American landscape paintings by Phillips and Brownlee is informed by environmental art history, an emergent line of inquiry within the environmental humanities that considers how visual and material cultures represent the natural world. To date, the relatively limited scope of prominent scholarship in this field has focused on the historical landscape painting tradition. Significantly, the landscape painting tradition has a masculinist skew and an over-investment in the study of this genre by environmental art historians inevitably risks excluding women from the discourse. The American and Canadian landscape traditions, in particular, have long cast the continent’s wild spaces as belonging to intrepid Western men. The art historian Marilyn McKay argues that this gender bias is especially strong in Canada, where the punishing terrain and climate were exalted for producing a rugged, virile and ‘manly’ national character in the decades following the confederation of the British North American colonies in 1867. British women in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Canada duly perceived that they had a limited role to play in the cultural treatment of their natural surroundings. According to McKay, ‘consciously or unconsciously, they understood that panoramas belonged to men’. The decorative traditions of British women, however, often feature natural imagery and, in particular, florals. It thus seems fair to ask whether Morris’ flowered quilt and others like it might be implicated in the same power politics that have been attributed to the masculine landscape painting tradition in the North American context.

Answering this question requires that we situate Morris’ embroideries within the global context of the British Empire. Morris’ embroidery designs derive in large part from Indian chintz fabrics. Today, ‘chintz’ is used to describe any cotton or

30 McKay, Picturing the Land, 58.
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linen fabric having a floral pattern; but historically the term referred to a cotton fabric made in India for the European market that was painted or printed with vegetal designs using mordant and resist dyes. The brilliance and fastness of their dyes made chintz fabrics novel and desirable in seventeenth-century Europe, where fabric-printing techniques were still relatively primitive.\textsuperscript{31} Indian chintz fabrics were imported to England by the East India Company as early as 1613, and their popularity rocketed in the early 1680s.\textsuperscript{32} The commercial success of Indian chintz in the British marketplace compelled parliament to protect the domestic textile industry by banning the importation of this commodity in 1701. As the supply of Indian chintz in Britain diminished, the cultural value of these fabrics and their designs increased.\textsuperscript{33} During this period, British embroiderers developed a floral iconography inspired by Indian chintz designs; however, needlework booklets with printed designs modelled after Asian floral designs were being sold in continental Europe as early as 1600.\textsuperscript{34} The influence of Indian chintz endures in Morris’ quilt embroideries, which include several floral motifs that were common in Indian chintz fabrics designed for the British and French markets towards the end of the late eighteenth century, including peonies, chrysanthemums and lilies.\textsuperscript{35}

According to the art historian Natasha Eaton, so-called oriental wares, including Indian chintz panels and fabrics, were initially assigned value in eighteenth-century England because they internationalised domestic interiors and thereby defined the home in relation to the British Empire.\textsuperscript{36} Similarly, the historian Joanna de Groot cites the British market for Indian cotton and cotton-based textiles to argue that common consumer goods connected average Britons to the larger British Empire from the eighteenth century onwards. She writes:

\begin{quote}
the meanings of everyday activities like dress, eating or cleaning were part of experiences and ideas of home, community, family and gender roles and differences, but also had powerful, if implicit, associations with patriotism (the use of ‘empire’ goods) and exotic pleasures (the glamour of familiar tropical or oriental products).\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{31} Irwin and Brett, \textit{Origins of Chintz}, 1.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 3, 5.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{A Picture Book of Flowers in English Embroidery} (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1938), n.p.; Lemuire and Riello, 906.
\textsuperscript{35} Irwin and Brett, \textit{Origins of Chintz}, 20–1.
\textsuperscript{37} Joanna de Groot, ‘Metropolitan Desires and Colonial Connections: Reflections on Consumption and Empire’, in \textit{At Home With the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World} edited by Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, 166–90 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 170, doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511802263.008.
Groot writes as a contributor to *At Home With The Empire* (2006), edited by Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, who themselves assert that that the nineteenth-century British notion of ‘home’ was ‘informed by tropes of material comfort associated with food, cleanliness, etc., themselves dependent upon imperial products’.

Their view is that imperial power had by then become so omnipresent in the everyday lives of Britons, regardless of their position on the imperial agenda, that it was simply mundane. As such, while Morris’ embroideries connect her to ‘global circuits of production, distribution and exchange, [and] to the exploitation and oppression of millions of other imperial subjects’, she may not have recognised this herself.

Morris then inadvertently compounds the political significance of her chintz-inspired embroideries by surrounding them with squares of printed cotton fabrics manufactured in England. The popularity of Indian chintz textiles incentivised British and European manufacturers to appropriate Indian craftsmanship and substitute domestic products for these imported commodities. As we have seen, embroiderers were amongst the first to emulate the effect of Indian chintz fabrics, adapting their floral and botanical motifs, and Morris’ own embroideries are informed by this tradition. Economic historians speculate that the development of England and Europe’s cotton printing industries were spurred by protectionist measures, including the prohibition on Indian chintz imports by British parliament in 1701. Plain Indian cottons called ‘calicoes’ were initially exempt from the sumptuary legislation, and they thereby became the ground for the English woodblock printers aspiring to replicate the effect of Indian chintz. When the consumption of all imported cotton was prohibited for a period during the first half of the eighteenth century, English calico printers adapted their practices to fustians and linens. Wooden blocks were used by calico printers until the 1750s, when copperplate printing came into use. Metal plates enabled the production of both considerably larger repeat units and more detailed designs than could be achieved with wooden blocks. The biggest innovation came in 1783, when the Scot Thomas Bell patented roller printing, a method of printing using engraved cylinders. After the spinning jenny, water frame and spinning mule were invented

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41 Lemuire and Riello, ‘East and West’, 894.


45 Lemuire and Riello, ‘East and West’, 903.
in the 1770s, the English north-west quickly transformed into a profitable cotton-manufacturing centre, and by 1820 the bulk of England’s calico printers could be found near the cotton mills in Lancashire and Carlisle.46

Printed cottons were thus seen to represent Britain’s ingenuity and its new industrial capabilities, further establishing its confidence as a global power. Having finally produced a domestic product that rivalled Indian chintz, the British increasingly differentiated themselves from the Indians by their command of mechanical manufacturing.47 The sheer productivity of roller printing, for example, was thrown into stark relief when compared to the process of an Indian craftsman, who typically took two weeks to paint a roll of calico 7 metres long.48 According to the historian Michelle Maskiell, such comparisons strategically cast ‘contemporary Indian handicrafts [as] living antiques, in the sense that they were products of a civilization that was itself considered antique’.49 By the second half of the nineteenth century, industrial exhibitions like the Great Exhibition (1851) at the Crystal Palace in London’s Hyde Park duly attributed the great political and economic power of the British Empire to its ability to appropriate and improve upon design and decorative traditions from its colonies using domestic manufacturing. By extension, the British Government actively endorsed British textiles over all Indian ones. This is further seen in the promotion of the woven shawls manufactured in Paisley, Scotland, over Kashmiri shawls by British officials. For example, Queen Victoria often appeared publicly in Paisley shawls though she gave Kashmiri shawls to her ladies-in-waiting.50 In the early twentieth century, Indian nationalists encouraged the revival of indigenous textile traditions. India’s handicraft revivalist movement protested against the obliteration of India’s textile industry by the rise of British manufacturing and its effect on worldwide tastes, and it further sought to recover India’s textile traditions from their entanglement with British colonial interests.51

Morris collapses this material history into her quilt by combining Indian chintz imagery in her embroideries with some of the earliest machine-printed cottons of English manufacture. The bulk of the fabrics in Morris’ quilt feature small-scale floral prints that were most likely produced using roller printers, which were widely adopted by English textile manufacturers after 1815.52 The size of the rollers limited their capacity to tell visual stories, and designers thus turned to decorative motifs

47 Lemuire and Riello, ‘East and West’, 900.
48 Ibid., 903.
that required less surface area. According to the design historian Peter Floud, the limitations of roller printing produced new design conventions that ‘consisted of patterns with the motifs arranged in continuous parallel vertical cascades’. Geometric and abstract motifs were also introduced into the vernacular, though naturalism in the form of mossy and floral trails remained popular. For example, Morris’ quilt incorporates four lengths of chintz featuring trails of pansies printed in red on a light blue ground. At first glance, the four printed cotton lengths at the quilt’s outermost edge might be mistaken for being block-printed; however, the flowers and birds in this design are stippled. Stippling is a shading technique that is unique to engraving, so we can deduce that this cotton was printed using either an engraved copper plate or an engraved copper cylinder. The short vertical repeat in the cotton at the border of Morris’ quilt suggests that it was produced by a copper cylinder rather than by a copper plate. The number of printed cottons in Morris’ patchwork is itself a testament to the accelerated cycle of commerce that roller-printing technology made possible.

Though Morris made her quilt in Ireland, there is evidence that printed cotton was available for purchase in Upper Canada and would have adorned the interiors of other homesteads in the region. Cotton cloth became Britain’s leading export in the early nineteenth century, and by 1795 Canada and the United States already accounted for over half of England’s cotton exports, which would have included printed cotton fabrics. The Morris family would have been able to purchase printed cottons from the general stores in Yonge Mills and Elizabethtown. These were both owned by Charles Jones (1781–1840), who imported more than approximately 200 yards of printed cotton to sell in his stores in 1808. An invoice book kept by a dry goods business in Toronto during the 1840s, which is now in the Archives of Ontario, further shows that printed cotton was readily available to Upper Canadian consumers before Confederation in 1867. More than 20 of this invoice book’s line items include the word chintz, a term that would have referred to printed cotton and that appears frequently in regional advertisements throughout the colonial period. Many more of the record’s line items include descriptions of different types of printed cottons.

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57 Copperplate designs typically have large-scale vertical repeats, measuring up to a yard high, while engraved copper cylinder designs have reduced vertical repeats that do not exceed a foot in height: Montgomery, Printed Textiles, 291.
58 Montgomery, Printed Textiles, 287.
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cotton fabrics, including ‘rainbows’ and ‘fancies’. There is no mention of chintz in the Registers of Manifests for goods arriving by ship at the Toronto Customs House from the United States between 1836 and 1841. This seems to indicate that the bulk of Upper Canada’s imported textiles came from England, even though the United States began developing its textile printing industry after the Revolutionary War. The popularity of printed cotton amongst British settlers in Upper Canada shows that the imperial tastes exhibited by Morris’ quilt informed Upper Canada’s consumer culture.

Painted and printed cottons also appealed to north-eastern Woodlands Indigenous people, who developed aesthetic sensibilities that favoured florals over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The acceptance of printed cotton fabrics by this demographic is documented by Isaac Weld, who wrote an account of his travels through the United States and Canadian provinces in the 1790s. On the subject of Indigenous men’s dress in Upper Canada, he writes, ‘when it is cool, or when they dress themselves to visit their friends, they put on a short shirt, loose at the neck and wrists, generally made of coarse figured cotton or calico of some gaudy pattern, not unlike what would be used for window or bed curtains’. The fabrics that Weld identifies as fashionable amongst Woodlands Indigenous men during the 1790s would have been the plate-printed fustians or linens that predated the integration of English industrial cotton manufacturing and printing at the beginning of the nineteenth century. While we might reason the Indigenous peoples adopted printed fabrics and cottons out of necessity or convenience, there is evidence that they took an active interest in their floral designs. For example, we have already considered the fact that Traill briefly describes being visited by a number of Indigenous women who wished to admire her husband’s chintz dressing gown. This passing episode in her autobiography suggests that north-eastern Woodlands Indigenous women, in particular, admired and studied the floral fabrics common in settler households.

The prevalence of printed English cotton in Upper Canada therefore derived in part from the fact that British settlers and business interests had traded these materials to purchase access to North America’s natural resources and land from Indigenous peoples throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, north-eastern Woodlands Indigenous people were likely to have obtained flowered fabrics by way of their fur trade with the Hudson’s Bay Company. The British began trading with Canada’s Indigenous populations in the seventeenth century through the Hudson’s

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63 The Woodlands refers to the forested territory that once extended from the Atlantic coast to the Great Plains, and from Lake Superior’s northern shores down to the Gulf of Mexico. Before the arrival of Europeans, this territory was populated by Indigenous communities belonging to the Algonquian, Iroquoian, Siouan and Muskogean language groups.
64 Isaac Weld, Travels through the states of North America, and the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, during the years 1795, 1796, and 1797 (London: John Stockdale, 1799), 380.
65 Traill, The Backwoods of Canada, 121.
Bay Company, which, like the East India Company, was established by royal charter in the seventeenth century. The company was primarily concerned with acquiring beaver pelts for the English hatting and felting industries from Indigenous trappers. In an effort to maximise the North American marketplace and avoid cultural clashes, the company relied on its traders to report what commodities were desirable to Indigenous trappers. It is conceivable that the developing taste for floral fabrics amongst north-eastern Woodlands Indigenous people resulted in a supply of printed English cottons at a number of the company’s trading posts. Starting in the 1740s, cloth became one of the most popular commodities at the company’s trading posts. The possibility that printed English cotton fabrics accounted for an amount of this is presented by the historian Edwin Rich, who writes that ‘gay cloth of different kinds’ could be procured at company trading posts during the eighteenth century. The important place of printed English cotton in Indigenous–British relations illustrates the historian Maxine Berg’s assertion that ‘the process of inventing new consumer good to substitute for Asian luxuries was not just about connections between Europe and Asia, but included Africa and the Americas’.

British textiles and other trade goods duly formed the basis for both co-operation and conflict between British and Indigenous populations in the Great Lakes and St Lawrence River valley regions throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For example, at the close of the American Revolution, British authorities offered the Mississauga guns, ammunition, clothing, 12 laced hats and red cloth sufficient for 12 coats in exchange for territory stretching along the northern shores of Lake Ontario and the St Lawrence River, where they wished to resettle Loyalist refugees. The Crawford Purchase, which is so called because its British interests were represented by Captain William Redford Crawford, was negotiated with a number of Mississauga chiefs at a meeting on Carleton Island in Lake Ontario in October 1783. This meeting was also attended by a representative from the Mohawk at Kanesatake, Chief Mynas, who ceded a further tract of land along the upper part of the St Lawrence River south of the Ottawa River in exchange for a year’s worth of clothing for his family. While the British authorities regarded the Crawford Purchase as a transfer of land ownership, Indigenous authorities are likely to have regarded the Crown’s offerings as Tributes or

gifts acknowledging their agreement to share the land with the dislocated people.\textsuperscript{74} British textiles were thus one of the means by which the British imposed their understanding of land as property and a resource onto Indigenous people and territories, and we must recognise that the situation of Morris and her quilt in Upper Canada was made possible by the disproportionate trade of south-eastern Ontario for lengths of cloth and other trade goods.

Significantly, then, Morris’ quilt is a physical artefact of the first stages of settler colonialism in Upper Canada, meaning it arrived with outsiders who came to inhabit Indigenous land and claim it as their own on largely false pretences. Settler colonialism is distinct from what scholars Eve Tuck, Kate McCoy and Marcia McKenzie call ‘exploitation colonialism’, which entails:

\begin{quote}
small numbers of colonizers [going] to a new place in order to dominate a local labor force to harvest resources to send back to the metropole, for example the spice and opium trade that impelled the colonization of India by several different European empires.\textsuperscript{75}
\end{quote}

Of course, as we have seen, Morris’ embroideries reference the Indian chintz fabrics that were introduced to British consumers by way of exploitation colonialism, and we might understand her quilt as an object that bridges the histories of exploitation colonialism in India with those of settler colonialism in North America. In fact, the British floral decorative traditions that had initially been inspired by India’s chintz fabrics found a new home in Canada precisely because they had been so fully appropriated by the British imperial imaginary that they had become commonplace aspects of British life. As such, they contributed to a visual and material culture in early Canada that was invested in supplanting indigeneity, implicating British women and their domestic decorations in the process of settler colonialism and its dependence on the continuous disavowal of Indigenous history and rights.

According to Tuck, McCoy and McKenzie, one of the notable characteristics of settler colonialism is its ‘attempt (and failure) to contain Indigenous agency and resistance’.\textsuperscript{76} Indeed, in keeping with the cultural agency that the northeastern Woodlands Indigenous people exercised by adopting English printed cotton fabrics in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they ultimately subverted the assimilationist policies and attitudes that intensified in Canada during the Victorian period by concealing sacred information in the floral beadwork that they developed in response to the floral decorative traditions imported by settlers like


\textsuperscript{76} Tuck, McCoy and McKenzie, ‘Land Education’, 6.
Morris. Indigenous artists in the Great Lakes and St Lawrence River valley region began incorporating florals into their quillwork and moose-hair embroidery at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and floral beadwork evolved thereafter. The graphic representations of the Indigenous cosmologies that had been so prominent in the region’s visual and material culture prior to contact were viewed with suspicion by the British because they represented non-Christian spiritual beliefs. The development of an Indigenous floral iconography was therefore seen to herald the eventual assimilation of Indigenous people into settler society. As a matter of fact, Woodlands Indigenous beadworkers are known to have protected their cosmologies from the scrutiny of settlers by concealing their sacred signs in floral designs. For example, the sun and its sacred power, which was traditionally represented by a sequence of colourful, concentric rings of line work, was easily modified to look like a flower head, and it so appears on numerous historical Woodlands Indigenous objects, particularly those made for the tourist trade.

From her apparent enthralment with Indian chintz and its decorative language to her incorporation of the very fabrics that resulted from the appropriation of this foreign textile tradition by the British and their means of production, Morris inadvertently represents the imperial economy that was imposed upon Indigenous people in and around the Hudson’s Bay drainage basin starting in the seventeenth century. As we have seen, the trade in Indian chintz and English printed cottons by the East India Company and the Hudson’s Bay Company, respectively, were integral to the success of British manufacturing and enabled British settler colonial ambitions in Canada, where fabrics of British manufacture were popular amongst settlers and traded with Indigenous peoples for access to natural resources and land. Indeed, The Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant was instituted by the Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee First Nations in 1701 precisely because the foreign marketplace had disrupted their environmental and political relationships, and later land agreements would further disorder Indigenous relations by dislocating Indigenous people from their traditional territories. Though north-eastern Woodlands Indigenous people resisted the power politics of imported florals by taking an aesthetic interest in such designs and appropriating them to their own ends, the floral decorative language exemplified by the quilt treasured by the Morris family nevertheless contributed to a visual and material culture that sought to normalise the occupation of Indigenous lands by British authorities and settlers.

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80 Phillips, Trading Identities, 195; Dubin, Floral Journey, 67.
Hegemonic masculinity and femininity in the ‘backblocks’ of the Waikato and King Country 1860s–1930s

MEG PARSONS AND KAREN FISHER
School of Environment, University of Auckland

Abstract

Through the medium of archival and visual sources, as well as oral histories, this study explores the transformation of one freshwater place, the Waipa River located within the Waikato and King Country districts of the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, from the 1860s through till the 1930s. This article addresses the neglect of gender within existing environmental history and historical geography literatures on settler colonial societies, and explores the gendered dimensions of Pākehā settlers’ transformation of the landscapes and waterscapes of the Wāipa River catchment. We draw attention to the role of Pākehā women in efforts to remove and remodel the indigenous forests and wetlands, and in doing so challenge the long-standing historical narrative that positioned Pākehā settler men as the sole actors in the radical environmental changes that took place within Aotearoa since the commencement of formal British colonisation in 1840. Through the lens of hegemonic masculinity and femininity we demonstrate how Pākehā gender norms informed the ways in which Pākehā men and women in the Waikato and King Country perceived their local environments (such as wetlands), their own and others’ day-to-day activities, and how they interacted with other communities (both human and ecological).

Keywords: gender, environmental history, historical geography, colonialism, masculinity

Introduction

This article addresses the neglect of gender within scholarship examining the environmental history and historical geography of settler colonial societies and explores the gendered dimensions of Pākehā settlers’ transformation of the landscapes and waterscapes of Aotearoa’s Waikato and King Country (Te Rohe Potāe) districts from the 1860s to the 1930s. We draw attention to the role of Pākehā women in efforts to remove and remodel the forests and wetlands.
Traditionally, environmental historians adopted, with limited consideration to
gender, the simplistic storyline of Pākehā men battling against and ultimately
taming the ‘howling wilderness’ to create productive landscapes that sought to
replicate and improve on British agrarian traditions.¹ More recent histories partially
disrupt this narrative by examining how Māori iwi (tribe) and hapū (sub-tribe)
relationships within their rohe (traditional lands and waters) were negatively
impacted by dispossession and ecological colonialism.² However, the experiences
of women, and the ways in which gender norms (of masculinities and femininities)
shaped resource usage remains largely overlooked within current scholarship about
colonialism and environmental changes in Aotearoa New Zealand. The purpose
of this article is to offer methodological and theoretical insights into researching
gender within the fields of environmental history and historical geography through
the use of a feminist historical geography research approach and the theoretical lens
of hegemonic masculinity and masculinities.

By employing these theoretical and methodological techniques we trace how Pākehā
gender hegemony (underpinned by patriarchal ideology) sought to exclude and
marginalise Pākehā women within discourses of farming and landscape changes
(as well as Māori and other non-white women), and to define the relationships
between the farmer and the land as one that was implicitly masculine (and Pākehā).
We focus on Pākehā rather than Māori gender norms, and linkages to environmental
changes that occurred within the Waikato and King Country, as there is insufficient
space here to attend to the gendered effects of colonisation on Māori women and men,
and the impacts of settler colonialism on Māori relationships with their rohe, tūpuna
(ancestors) and hauora (well-being). Indeed, as two Māori wahine (women) who are
personally and professionally steeped within the Indigenous research paradigm and
Indigenous methodologies, we are critically aware of the need for scholars, decision-
makers and members of the diverse publics that comprise contemporary Aotearoa
to recognise the past and present realities of settler colonialism.³ However, we could
not (in our opinion) provide adequate time and words to explain how Māori world
views (Tē Ao Māori) differed from those of Pākehā (Tē Ao Pākehā), the specific
gender norms that are woven through mātauraunga Māori (Māori knowledge) and
tikanga (laws), and the gendered implications of colonisation, alongside discussion

³ This paper forms part of a larger transdisciplinary project that seeks to explore the effects of colonisation on Māori relationships with the Waipā River and its tributaries.
Hegemonic masculinity and femininity in the ‘backblocks’ of the Waikato and King Country 1860s–1930s

of Pākehā women and environmental changes. For further information about how Māori women’s land rights and abilities to exercise their mana (authority and power) were constrained by the imposition of mid-Victorian British cultural norms and legal traditions, see the works of historians such as Tony Ballantyne and Ani Mikaere.

A note on the language used in this article: we deliberately chose to employ the term Pākehā to refer to people of European origin or descent instead of the more commonly used ‘New Zealand Europeans’. Pākehā, as the historian Simon Dench writes, ‘frames non-Māori New Zealanders from a Māori perspective’. Whilst at times the label ‘European’ may seem more appropriate, Pākehā reminds the reader of the important distinction between Māori and the European settlers. The term ‘settler’ is likewise criticised by scholars and indigenous community members for erasing the violence of colonisation. It is more accurate, many New Zealand historians argue, to use the categories of invader, coloniser and occupier. While the term ‘settler’ does imply the notion of peaceful ‘settling’, it also details specific forms of violence (legal, physical, epistemological and symbolic) that were inflicted on indigenous people in specific colonial relationships. In this article, we deliberately employ the term ‘settler’ in recognition of both the distinctiveness of settler colonialism from other forms of colonisation, and to highlight the whitewashing of hegemonic representations of Aotearoa’s colonial history as being more humane than elsewhere. Furthermore, as two scholars whose whakapapa (genealogy) include both Māori


and Pākehā ancestors and who self-identify as ‘Māori/Pākehā/other’ hybrids, we consciously employ the term ‘settler’ to unsettle and potentially decolonise narratives about environmental history.\footnote{Karen T. Fisher, ‘Positionality, subjectivity, and race in transnational and transcultural geographical research’, \textit{Gender, Place & Culture} 22, no.4 (2015): 1–18, doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2013.879097.}


In doing so, we aim to contribute to scholarship on historical geography and environmental history, as well as feminist rural studies, and to add to the growth of humanities and social science scholarship that explores human–environment interactions through an intersectional lens.

**Methodological approach**

The primary focus of our research project was to understand how different social groups conceptualised and interacted with the Waipā River and its tributaries over two centuries, which included how specific knowledge and values shaped how Māori and Pākehā responded to environmental changes. Gender never featured in our thinking because, we now realise, we were conditioned through training and academic experiences in Indigenous environmental geography and environmental history to be attuned to indigeneity (and ‘race’) as a category of analysis, seminal works being largely silent on gender (or other subjectivities such as class and sexuality).\footnote{Brad Coombes, Jay T. Johnson and Richard Howitt, ‘Indigenous Geographies I: Mere Resource Conflicts? The Complexities in Indigenous Land and Environmental Claims’, \textit{Progress in Human Geography} 36, no. 6 (December 2012): 810–21; Sonia Leonard et al., ‘The Role of Culture and Traditional Knowledge in Climate Change Adaptation: Insights from East Kimberley, Australia’, \textit{Global Environmental Change} 23, no. 3 (June 2013): 623–32, doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2013.02.012; Meg Parsons et al., ‘Disrupting Path Dependency: Making Room for Indigenous Knowledge in River Management’, \textit{Global Environmental Change} 56 (2019): 95–113, doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.03.008; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, \textit{Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples} (New York: Zed Books, 2013); Garth Harmsworth, Shaun Awatere and Mahuru Robb, ‘Indigenous Māori Values and Perspectives to Inform Freshwater Management in Aotearoa-New Zealand’, \textit{Ecology and Society} 21, no. 4 (October 2016), doi.org/10.5751/ES-08804-210409.}

In seeking to insert Indigenous voices into accounts of environmental geography, geographers (ourselves included) were guilty of myopic thinking that...
overlooks the intersectional subjectivities of people’s lives. The shocking realisation that we were unconsciously erasing gender (despite our self-identification as feminist scholars) from the research questions we were asking and the research project we designed began when the lead author started collecting initial data (memoirs and oral histories). In the process of reading along and against the archival grain as well as listening to the stories that women (sometimes men) told about themselves, their homes, communities and environmental conditions, particular gender norms and expectations of what was socially acceptable behaviour for men and women became common themes. We, thus, returned to our research project and sought to consider how to adopt a more nuanced research approach more attuned to the complexities of lived realities. We decided to adopt a feminist historical geography approach, informed by feminist political ecology, decolonial theory and intersectionality thinking, because of the emphasis on hybrid methodological tools and the focus on analysing the multiple subjectivities and intersectional power dynamics of Waikato and King Country communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Over the last three decades, a subfield of feminist historical geography has emerged, influenced by inter- and multidisciplinary feminist scholarship and the work in fields within the disciplines of geography and history, as well as post-structural, postcolonial, decolonial and postmodern theorising and approaches. Consequently, feminist historical geography does not conform to many of the approaches and methods employed by traditional historical geography or environmental history. For instance, the standard historical materials (court records, government reports and correspondence, journals and newspapers) often contain limited information about women’s geographies and embodied experiences of places. Accordingly, feminist historical geographers draw on other primary sources that provide insight into women’s lives—worlds in the past (including oral histories, drawings, clothing and other material objects, stories and travel writings). Following the methodological practices of feminist historical geographers and feminist environmental historians, we draw on written accounts, photographs and oral histories to piece together the highly fragmented voices of women (and some men) who lived in the Waikato and King Country (specifically within the catchment of the Waipā River) during the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The diversity of materials collected provided a necessary counterweight to colonial archives and top-down accounts of environmental history. Collections held in the national archives are the records of central government departments, which are legally required to prepare and deposit their documents with archives within certain time frames. Public library collections contain books and personal collections of individuals or families deemed important to the history and heritage of the nation or region (often linked to political, social, scientific, cultural or economic achievements). Archival and (to a lesser extent) public library collections in Aotearoa, paralleling many other countries, are typically filled with the writings and voices of Pākehā men, and the knowledge, experiences and perspectives of women, gender non-binary/diverse and non-white subjects are marginalised. Accordingly, for the purpose of our research it was necessary to go beyond archival collections and seek out other empirical materials to fill the gaps and silence in the historical records. We did this by drawing on newspaper articles, images and, most importantly, oral histories.

Oral histories add the view of eyewitnesses to existing records, providing new or additional information and insights. An oral history provides personal perceptions of individuals who were there, so we can learn not only what happened to people in the past, but the thoughts and feelings they recalled having at that time. Oral accounts are sometimes criticised by scholars who are more comfortable with historical materials that are written down and/or quantifiable for being only (inter)subjective experiential accounts of the past (which are changeable, qualitative and fragmentary). However, we do not consider the subjective, personal and embodied dimensions of oral histories to be a methodological weakness and instead argue (following on from Brian Williams and Mark Riley) that oral accounts offer historical geographers and environmental historians with a deep source for investigating and situating environmental changes,

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19 Alan R. H. Baker, “‘The Dead Don’t Answer Questionnaires’: Researching and Writing Historical Geography’, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 21, no. 2 (July 1997): 231–43, doi.org/10.1080/03098269708725427; Mills, ‘Cultural–Historical Geographies of the Archive’. 
practices, power relations and meaning-making. In our research, we listened to, transcribed and then analysed the audio recordings of 16 oral histories (two of the oral histories involved two interviewees, bringing the total to 18 interviewees) of individuals who lived in the Waikato and King Country during the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries (see Table 1). The recordings, made by historians over the last four decades, were held by National Library and Hamilton City Libraries. In addition to the archival materials and oral histories, we also analysed three published memoirs. Memoirs serve as an important medium for many people, particularly women, whose voices are largely silenced and censored in other written mediums (literary, media and government accounts). As with oral histories, memoirs provide unique spaces (between experiences and memories) where people can recall their lives and make statements about themselves, their experiences and their values (both in the past and present day). Scholars need to approach such sources with a degree of caution, however, because memoirs often began first as the writings of an individual and were later reworked at a different time and place. Nevertheless, memoirs offer significant insights into the interactions of people with their local environments, and how multiple subjectivities influence people’s perceptions of, and actions in response to, the environment.

We employed a thematic analysis, following the six-stage process outlined by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, widely employed within social science and health research, to analyse our collected texts. Scholars note that thematic analysis is particularly useful in identifying patterns and keywords within data sets. The data analysis process involved familiarisation with the data, followed by an initial coding phase that was conducted manually, the grouping of codes, and finally theme development. The texts provided insights into how gender norms within the Waikato and King Country shaped how individuals perceived themselves, other


21 One memoir was written by seven siblings from a Pākehā family (the Goodalls), in which they recount their childhood spent growing up on a farm in the Waikato. Another was written by a Pākehā woman (Johnstone) who lived her entire life on various farms within the Waipā River catchment. The final memoir we examined was by a Pākehā man (Spencer Westmacott) who moved from his family farm in Canterbury to establish a farm in the King Country during the decade before the First World War. See Bernice Monrath Johnstone, Not a Pioneer! A Memoir of Waipa and Raglan, 1871–1960: Memories of Bernice Monrath Johnstone of Three Oaks, Whatawhata, New Zealand (Ottawa: P . R. Roberts, 2004); Spencer Westmacott, The After-Breakfast Cigar: Selected Memories of a King Country Settler (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1977); Hilary Goodall et al., Good God—The Goodalls! The Adventures of a Waikato Farming Family (Hamilton: Larry Goodall, 2018).


people and their local environmental conditions; which is to say how people’s embodied experiences of their environments (be it their homes, gardens, farms, forests, wetlands, rivers, weather conditions and townships) were influenced by particular, spatially and temporally located, gender norms.

One significant risk in conducting thematic analysis, and qualitative research more generally, is that the researchers’ own bias and assumptions (conscious and unconscious) about the topic shape what is coded and themed. Following on from other feminist scholars, we reject positivist assumptions of ‘universal truth’ and instead recognise that our subjectivities inform all aspects of our research. Our decision to embark on a research project that investigates the historical and cultural geographies of the Waipā River catchment, for instance, emerged because of our personal connections to the area. Both authors grew up (at least partly) in the region and are of mixed heritage (Māori/Pākehā/other). Moreover, the second author affiliates (through her mother) to the two major Māori iwi (tribal) groups (Ngāti Maniapoto and Waikato–Tainui) whose rohe (ancestral lands and waters) includes the Waipā River; through her father she traces her whakapapa (genealogy) to Pākehā who arrived in the area to ‘settle’ and farm in the nineteenth century. Accordingly, we sought to embrace self-reflexivity throughout all aspects of the research process and acknowledge that our life experiences, whānau (family) histories and subjectivities indelibly inform this work. In the rest of this article, we explore our (subjective, partial, but nevertheless insightful) readings of gendered experiences of Pākehā living in the Waikato and King Country.

**Results and discussion**

**Invading, occupying and transforming the Waikato Delta: 1860s–1900s**

While the Treaty of Waitangi, signed by representatives of various Māori iwi and the British Government in 1840, was meant to guarantee the protection of Māori land and natural resource rights, colonial officials did not honour its terms. The settler-led government actively sought to appropriate Māori land and to limit the abilities of Māori to exercise rangatiratanga (chiefly authority) over natural resources using military, financial and legal mechanisms. In the Waikato district, the centre of the King Movement (Kingitanga) that opposed selling land to Pākehā, the appropriation

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of Māori land and waterways came first through military actions with a British military invasion. After the warfare had ended, the government confiscated more than 480,000 hectares of land from Māori, which was allocated to Pākehā men. A journalist travelling through the Waikato at the time of the invasion called for mass migration of ‘thousands, and tens of thousands, of industrious and necessitous [English] country-men into the fertile plains’. Such writings, underpinned by settler colonial narratives of untouched nature, positioned the land as lying unused awaiting the arrival of hard-working Pākehā (men) to prune, plant and develop the land into an improved version of rural Britain. Such a vision of the Waikato floodplains epitomises the Pākehā settler gaze, which was classed, racialised and gendered. It was a vision that dismissed the legitimacy of Māori occupation, livelihoods and way of life, and imposed mid-Victorian British understandings of human–environment relations and gendered behaviour.

Figure 1: A Pākehā man (described as a ‘bushman’) and a young boy beside a hut in an unknown location in the ‘backblocks’ of the King Country (Te Rohe Potāe).

Although the photograph was published in 1919, it is reminiscent of drawings and photographs depicting Pākehā men half a century earlier in the Waikato.

Source: Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections, AWNS.19190102.3.4.


27 Māori from the Waikato-Tainui iwi (who supported the Kīngitanga movement) sought refuge with Ngāti Maniapoto in the area that became known as Te Rohe Potae (the King Country). The region remained under the authority of Ngāti Maniapoto until 1882 when the iwi agreed to allow the colonial government to begin to construct a railway line and ‘opened up’ the area for Pākehā settlers. Michael Belgrave, Dancing with the King: The Rise and Fall of the King Country, 1864–1885 (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2017).


30 [Anonymous], ‘Travels in Waikato’.
The colonisation of the Waikato (as elsewhere in Aotearoa) was founded on specific beliefs about what the environment should look like, how it should be used and who should be allowed to derive benefits from it. The scholar Jill Casid highlights how colonial plantations and farms across the European colonial world ‘justified and glorified patriarchally organised and controlled agricultural production and heterosexual reproduction as the necessary bases for family and for national and imperial stability, peace and prosperity’. At the heart of Pākehā imagined geographies of the Waikato was the farm (a constructed and carefully cultivated site of pastoral agriculture or horticulture), a place where ‘nature’ was improved through the intervention, in Casid’s words, ‘of “man” that functioned as both the material impress and reproducing sign of empire’. Throughout the late nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth centuries, Pākehā farmers (a category that was exclusively used in reference to men) in the district wrote how the biota and climatic conditions were tests of their manliness, something they needed to battle against and ultimately command. Pākehā men’s abilities to endure living ‘rough’ (in tents, a whare or slab huts) in a harsh environment, and employ their physical strength and mental resilience were some of the key features of ideal rural manliness. The genesis myth, like those recorded by the historian Katie Holmes in her history of the Mallee in Victoria, Australia, is found throughout the history of farming in the Waikato and King Country: hard-working Pākehā men (pioneers or settlers) who cleared the forests, drained the ‘swamps’, survived floods and droughts, and ultimately created thriving agricultural communities. The common tropes of stories (told and retold within families, schools and histories) about the region emphasise Pākehā men’s abilities to withstand harsh environments (the ‘forces of nature’ such as fog, floods, drought and peat fires) through the application of their bodily strength and courage. In doing so, these men enacted the ‘great transformation of the land’ from inhospitable, unproductive (indigenous) wastelands into productive

32 Jill H. Casid, Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xxii.
pastoral properties that formed part of rural communities.\textsuperscript{34} Alongside drainage efforts, the sowing of grasses (see Figure 2), the building of houses and roads and the introduction of livestock, the planting of introduced species of exotic flora and fauna was positioned as a key way Pākehā men could correct the perceived environmental deficits of the existing landscapes and waterscapes and ensure their ‘dominion’ over nature.\textsuperscript{35}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure2.png}
\caption{A Pākehā man standing in a burnt-out section of land (somewhere in the King Country in the early twentieth century), sowing grass seeds.}
\end{figure}

Although there was a small amount of logging activity in the Waikato and King Country districts, the majority of indigenous vegetation (both forest and shrub) was cleared using fire.

Source: Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections, 2-V448.


Gendered tales of battling, becoming and dislocation: 1860s–1930s

The voices of women often barely registered through this hegemonic narrative of Pākehā masculine place-making, the few written records from the Waikato and King Country we located in the archives offering brief glimpses into wider histories. The letters women wrote to government officials or newspapers, as well as reflections recorded in the memoirs and oral histories (created later in their lives and recalling their memories through the prism of present-day concerns) we located, do, however, shed light on women's daily lives, domestic life and labour, and broader concerns. One letter written by a Pākehā woman living in the town of Cambridge (located alongside the Waikato River) in April 1866 to a newspaper recounts her and others’ difficulties in obtaining the basic ‘necessities of life’ (including clothes, bread and soap). In line with hegemonic femininity ideals that positioned women as carers and as physically vulnerable (in comparison to men’s imagined physical strength and resilience), the letter describes her fears for her children’s and others’ lives: ‘I find myself in a fearful state, with winter coming on, and every-thing wanting … if there is no assistance given the women and children may manage to live on vegetables but the young infants surely die’. The historian Maggie Pickering observes that ‘settling’ and taming the ‘wilderness’ typically represent women within the confines of the domestic spaces (of house and garden). In settler colonial societies, this frontier mythology often depicts the bush, forest and wetlands as threats to the well-being of white women, necessitating the retreat to the safety of home (the garden, veranda or house). In the ‘backblocks’—the Aotearoa version of the frontier—Pākehā women often recalled the bush and wetlands as being places of isolation, where they felt they did not belong at present, but could do so if they enacted the correct behaviour and practices (directed at environmental transformation).

Within the domestic sphere, which encompassed the house and gardens, Pākehā women developed a variety of practices to negotiate and mitigate the ‘smellscape’ of wetlands and ‘improve’ the landscape of the Waikato. In addition to planting trees (typically deemed a masculine task), local and international literature (much of which was written by women under pen names) emphasised the critical role women could play in beautifying and purifying the fever-inducing wetlands and creating healthy homes. Scientific discoveries about the role of plants in generating oxygen were widely reported in international and domestic newspapers and journals, and used to support existing miasmatic understandings of disease (with femininity

36 Bradford Haami, Pūtea Whakairo: Māori and the Written Word (Wellington: Huia in association with the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2004); Paterson and Wanhalla, He Reo Wahine.
closely aligned to domesticity and cleanliness). Newspapers instructed that women living in ‘marshy districts or places infected’ with bad air (miasmas) ‘should surround their dwellings with seeds of the most odorous flowers’. In 1875, one unnamed columnist who used the pen name ‘The Queen’ (which suggests the writer was a woman) informed readers that certain flowers, including sunflowers, lavender and narcissi, were ‘endowed with health-preserving properties’ and were ‘the most valuable of sanitary agents’. The cultivation of flowers in one’s garden was both a ‘delightful and humanising’ act to enrich the aesthetic appeal of the landscape, but also a way in which to ‘confer a positive benefit on society [which is] so great that it can hardly be overrated’. Indeed, Pākehā women often narrated the establishment of gardens (including flower beds, vegetable gardens and orchards) as the foundation of their efforts at homemaking; their so-called ‘becoming landscape’ wherein they could enact their own ecological transformations of ‘wild’ and unknown spaces into cultivated and defined places.

Pākehā women recorded with a tremendous sense of accomplishment and joy their efforts (or those of their mothers, sisters, daughters and daughters-in-law) in creating something (gardens) out of nothing (the ‘backblocks’). Likewise, Pākehā men spoke of their pride that their mothers and wives had created beautiful gardens on their farms (which were the envy of others in the district). Attractive flower beds, nicely mowed lawns and clipped hedges were all markers of particular cultural norms (class, ethnicity and gender) tied to rural hegemonic femininity. As Mary Meyer recounted in her oral history, she and the other girls in her local area were taught at home and at school about their responsibilities for maintaining gardens. At her school, the girls were required to maintain the school gardens, which consisted of exotic plants, year-round. Sometimes a few native trees remained, but emphasis was placed on ensuring that the indigenous fauna was surrounded by introduced species (hemmed in on all sides). As Shirley Finlayson recalled, her mother-in-law’s garden in 1914 consisted of a ‘huge laurel hedge … lots of good-quality shrubs [and] lovely camellias’, with the garden stretching around the house including lots of colourful flowers, and one ‘very large rimu’ by the front gate. Once she and her husband took over his family’s farm, Shirley extended the existing garden and added large numbers of expensive exotic plants (including cherry trees, maples, rhododendrons and azaleas) to bring colour, shade and structure to the garden. She sought out experts from the local

39 [Anonymous], ‘Health in Perfumes’.
40 [Anonymous], ‘Health from Flowers’.
41 The term ‘becoming landscape’ is used by Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt to refer to hybrid colonial landscapes. See Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, ‘Beyond the Water–Land Binary in Geography: Water/Lands of Bengal Re-Visioning Hybridity’, *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 13, no. 3 (2014): 505–29.
43 Jones interview with Meyer.
horticultural society for advice, and even commissioned a landscape architect to
design her herb garden. Indeed, many Pākehā women and men spoke about how
women were judged by their neighbours because of their gardens.44 Women attained
higher social standing within their communities based on the size and perceived
beauty of their gardens, which highlights how class intersected with gender norms.
Not only did women compete every year at their local agricultural and pastoral
(A&P) shows for the title of ‘best gladioli, gerberas, portulaca, and a host of other
colourful flowers’, but they and their neighbours made these same assessments
(about whose gardens were the best) in their day-to-day lives.45

Figure 3: A farmhouse surrounded by its garden somewhere in the
King Country.
Source: Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections.
AWNS-19191016-35-1.

Figure 4: A Pākehā woman with a baby awaiting a change of horses at Piopio,
King Country, 1914.
Source: Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections,

The ‘becoming landscape’ recounted by many Pākehā women in the records we
examined was more heavily centred on feelings of dislocation and isolation than
that described by men.46 Farms were sometimes located several hours’ horse ride
from the nearest town, which served to engender specific difficulties for women
to travel, access basic social services and socialise with others. Pregnancies
and childcare responsibilities, as well as inequitable power dynamics within

44 Ibid.
45 Goodall et al., Good God – The Goodalls!
46 Johnstone, Not a Pioneer!, 24.
households, meant women faced gender-specific restrictions on their ability to travel (see Figure 4). Many women, including Margaret Macky, joined the Women’s Division of Federated Farmers (which began to operate in the district in the late 1920s) as a way to ease their feelings of social isolation and allow them the opportunity to converse with other women. These feelings of dislocation and anxieties were mixed with pride that extended beyond sentimental constructions and narratives of home, such as hearth, safety, community, roots and belonging, to encompass the need to systematically transform the landscapes of the Waikato and King Country (from forests and wetlands to grasslands, parks, towns and gardens). These actions to transform environments also sought to erase the Indigenous presence within the sociocultural and biophysical landscapes and waterscapes of the Waikato and King Country.

Women as helpers not farmers: Gender behaviour and marginalised femininities: 1890s–1930s

In their oral histories and memoirs, Pākehā women, including Florence McGovern, Ethel Booth and Ngaire Featherston, all of whom lived in the Waikato backblocks during the 1860s–1930s period, depicted themselves as actively participating in and supporting the environmental changes that took place on their farms. This included the clearance of forests, drainage of wetlands, introduction of new plants and animals, and creation of gardens and homes. Bernice Johnstone, who lived on a series of sheep and dairy farms during her time in the Waikato (1872–1960), recalled that for her the shearing season (each October) was the ‘busiest time of the year’. Her responsibilities at that time of year included the preparation of groceries for the family and shearsers; making meals for her family, as well as the shearing gang (they always employed Māori shearers, who were overseen by a Pākehā farm manager); milking the cows; feeding the pigs and calves; washing clothes and dishes; feeding and bathing her youngest children; cleaning and other housework; and chopping the firewood. Overwhelmingly, Johnstone and other women narrated their involvement in accordance with the ideal of a ‘helpmate’ or assistant rather than a key actor or a farmer themselves. Yet oral histories and photographs of the time highlight that Pākehā women were actively engaged in farming and logging work and that their labour was not tokenistic but rather central to the operations and success of agricultural projects (which were part of environmental transformations) (see Figures 5 and 6).

47 Ibid., 15.
48 Ibid., 134–5.
Figure 5: ‘Dairying in the Backblocks’, taken in the King Country, 1901. Originally published in Auckland Weekly News, 19 April 1901, 3.
Source: Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections, AWNS-19010419-3-4.

Figure 6: Pākehā men and women engaged in logging in the King Country in 1918.
The original title (shown at the bottom of the image) emphasised that women were only undertaking logging work as a consequence of men being involved in the First World War.
Source: Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections, AWNS-19180523-38-5.
Mary Meyer, who was born in 1902 on a sheep farm in the Waikato before moving to a dairy farm near the Waipā River, later described herself as having been a ‘real land girl’ when she was a child and teenager. She described how her entire childhood was spent helping her father ‘with whatever he was doing’ on the farm, including ‘building oat sacks’, feeding the horses, ‘rolling the fleeces’, taking care of the sheep and making the hay.\textsuperscript{49} She added that when it was time to make hay on the farm, her entire family (mother, father, sister and she) would all be involved in the process. However, she and the other women were never expected to do the ‘the heavy work’; this was left to men (her father and neighbouring farmers who came to assist him). Meyer observed that, in comparison to other Pākehā ‘homesteads’, her childhood home was ‘washed less often’, and her mother’s cleaning regime was ‘dependent on what work needed to be done on the farm’. In making this brief statement, Meyer acknowledges that women’s lived experiences rarely perfectly aligned with the socially expected gender norms of the time, with the performances of hegemonic femininity (most notably those tied to domesticity) often imperfect. When Meyer married and went to live on a dairy farm, she continued to frame her responsibilities as the assistant to her husband, the farmer, and positioned herself within the domestic space. Yet, at the same time, she continued to be involved in the day-to-day activities of farming (most notably milking the cows) and acknowledged that she missed being a real ‘land girl’ and being out on the land every day and caring for her sheep (she declared she did not love cows the same way as she did sheep).\textsuperscript{50} Her farm work, however, was positioned as secondary (not her real work) to her other tasks, including preserving fruit, maintaining the garden, cleaning the house, cooking meals for the family and various farm workers, and taking care of the children. She also joined the Women’s Division of the Farmers’ Union (now Federated Farmers) and engaged in the organisation’s activities, including entering baking and flower-arranging competitions. Herein rests the multiple contradictions within these histories (‘her-stories’). The women frequently assign themselves to the role of supporting actors in their own memoirs, life histories and publications in a way that fits them within the gender hegemony (whereby women are positioned as secondary to men). The women told stories that not only undervalued the importance of their labour to the financial viability of the farming operations, but also dismissed or ignored the pleasure they gained from working on the land (be it cutting down trees, making hay or caring for livestock). Indeed, for these women, stepping outside the confines of domesticity allowed them to form connections to land, to animals and to themselves, which in turn reduced their feelings of isolation and dislocation, as well as their environmental anxieties about landscapes and waterscapes of the Waikato.

\textsuperscript{49} Jones interview with Meyer.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
Similarly, the oral histories of Pākehā men, recalling their lives spent on Waikato farms from the 1920s to the 1980s, repeatedly spoke about how they never considered that ‘a lady [should do] any hard farm work’ (as Bruce Henderson stated in his oral history). Henderson grew up on a farm outside Hamilton in the 1930s and 1940s and witnessed his mother milking the cows, helping with haymaking, feeding the farm dogs and working late into the night. Yet none of these activities were considered part of her ‘normal duties’.\(^{51}\) When Henderson himself later married (in the 1960s), he did not ‘expect [his] wife to help outside’ (on the farm). Rather, he spoke of how he and his wife occupied separate domains (her place was inside the garden gate and his was outside the gate). Henderson spoke with pride of how his ‘mother and [his] wife got [to create] really nice gardens and kept the [house] well’, which articulated the gender and class dimensions of hegemonic masculinity and femininity.\(^{52}\) Such notions of femininity were an expression of particular culturally situated gender norms traceable to the early nineteenth century and the emergence of the cult of domesticity in Britain and its settler colonies, which charged women with responsibility for their families and their nation’s moral and physical well-being. By the time the Waikato was being invaded and colonised, this ideology was firmly engrained in the belief systems of many of Pākehā settlers in the region. Accordingly, it was considered the duty of Pākehā women to create and maintain tidy, clean and ordered private (domestic) spaces to provide security for their family and the wider (settler colonial) community.\(^{53}\) Even if the daily lives of Pākehā women living in the backblocks bore little resemblance to the ideals of middle-class (decidedly urban) British Victorian domesticity, such imaginings held considerable cultural value. Moreover, domesticity described gender norms rather than specific actions that women should take, allowed considerable elasticity in terms of meaning and application (as Julie Jeffery observes in the rural US context), and ensured its durability across temporal and spatial contexts. More than a century later, such classifications of rural femininity involving labour that took place within domestic and private domains (within the boundaries of the homestead and not the farm, forest or town) continued to be articulated in the early to mid-twentieth century Waikato and King Country.\(^{54}\) In particular, rural hegemonic femininity continued to be popularly narrated as a wife and mother who devoted her time to ensuring her husband, children and wider family were fed, clothed and cleansed. Her home environment was also well-ordered, sweet-smelling and adorned with attractive artefacts (flowers, shrubs, box hedging), which was a testament to her capacities (like her husband’s) to command and control nature.

\(^{51}\) Jones interview with Henderson.
\(^{52}\) Ibid.
In reality, the lives of many women (particularly working-class Pākehā and Māori women) did not live up to the ideals of hegemonic rural femininity. Many women actively participated in what was then deemed masculine work, such as land clearance and drainage, and recalled those activities were more important (and more enjoyable) than housework. In her oral history, Florence Emily McGovern recalled her childhood and early adulthood spent on farms in the Waikato between 1902 and 1919. At the age of 14, she left school and worked on her family farm at Tuhikaramea (south-west of Hamilton). Her entire family, including her mother, were all involved in general farm work. McGovern's mother, she remembers, was someone far more comfortable doing 'anything at all outside' than being inside undertaking domestic activities. In contrast to the rural femininity ideal in the early twentieth century, McGovern declared that, in her family home, housework 'never worried us much ... all our time was needed outside on the farm' and she continued (at the age of 84 years) to view it as a pointless task. She recalled her childhood and teenage years spent cutting down 'tea-trees' (manuka, *Leptospermum scoparium*), digging out tree stumps, constructing drainage canals, milking, dragging out cows stuck in ditches and cutting firewood. After the trees were cut down, the remaining vegetation was burnt off and the cleared area planted with exotic trees and grasses. McGovern recalls with pride how the 'unimproved' and 'very swampy peaty' landscape was 'brought in' through her own and the rest of her family's transformative actions. Ultimately, their family farm was remade into 'jolly good … clean ground' which '[y]ou could run a mower over every bit of'.

Pākehā women who undertook farm work were often criticised, with their behaviour deemed unfeminine. Men wrote about how the bodies of women who undertook 'hard work' (farm labour) were 'gaunt', unattractive and rendered 'old before their time'. Such criticisms were often made by individuals (typically Pākehā men but also some women) from wealthier backgrounds (middle- to upper-class) who possessed the financial resources (unlike working-class households) to employ others to work as farm labourers or domestic servants. Those employed were often Māori individuals or entire families dispossessed of their lands and in desperate need of employment, as shown in the two contrasting photographs of Māori and Pākehā families in hop fields in the King Country (see Figures 7 and 8).

The writings differentiated between the supposedly inherent capacities of (Pākehā) women's bodies to undertake so-called hard labour 'taming' nature (as vulnerable and lacking the physical strength needed) and those of men's bodies (as strong and resilient). Such discourses served to justify men's domination over women, to locate features...

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56 Downs interview with McGovern.
of hegemonic masculinity outside the reach of women (including their abilities to seek to control ‘nature’) and to denigrate non-hegemonic (pariah) femininities (often working class and/or non-white) of those who engaged in labour outside the domestic sphere. In this way, multiple subjectivities (gender, class, race) intersected and operated within the rural landscapes of the Waikato and King Country wherein hegemonic masculinity (Pākehā, middle class, heterosexual) was at the apex of the social order.\(^{59}\)

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Women’s (in)capacities to make (financial) decisions

Pākehā women’s capacities to participate in decisions related to their daily lives and livelihoods were often severely constrained by gender hegemony and legal restrictions. Johnstone writes that one of the key hardships of the ‘home-making venture’ for her was feelings of powerlessness; despite her pre-marriage life as a teacher and her income having helped to supply the deposit for the farm, her life (she recalled in her 70s) was ‘dictated’ by her brother-in-law (‘Cam’). Whenever her husband was away working on tree-cutting and road-making contracts, which supplemented the farm’s limited income, her brother-in-law (who jointly owned the property) ‘took the place of “man of the house”’.60 After her husband’s death in 1915, Johnstone was forced to move with her children from her family’s farm, as her brother-in-law wanted to subdivide the property. Eventually, she and her adult sons ‘bought 145 acres of rough, uneven, and steep country on the banks of the Waipa’. As a widow in her 40s and 50s, she was forced to start the ‘home-making venture’ again, with the construction of a house and planting of a garden, as well as the clearing of scrub, and the drainage, ploughing and grassing of the land.61

The contribution of women such as Johnstone and others to the creation and operation of farms contrasted with the inequalities in decision-making power, access to finance and inheritance patterns amongst men and women. Henderson, for instance, recalled that his mother did not inherit any of her family’s several farming properties in the Waikato, and instead all the properties were divided amongst her male relatives (brothers, uncles, cousins and sons). Although the passing of the Married Women’s Property Act in Aotearoa in 1884 meant that, upon marriage, a woman no longer negated her legal personhood and she was legally able to retain property and hold cash of her own, few married women did so. Indeed, many rural Pākehā women spoke in their oral histories about the stresses that persisted within their lives due to the legal regime and social norms, which meant few of them, even in the mid-twentieth century, could access money. For these women, their bank accounts and property were in their husbands’ names, and even if they wanted to open their own bank account, bank managers refused their requests. Accordingly, Pākehā men were far more likely than women to inherit property and assets amongst farming families throughout the century.62 Few Pākehā women in rural areas actually owned property or brought with them large financial holdings in their own right.63 Inheritance practices were not simply based on the assumption that

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60 Johnstone, *Not a Pioneer!*, 119.
61 Ibid., 158.
63 Ibid., 208–9.
Pākehā women were incapable of running farms or managing finances, but also on deliberate policies and a legal tradition focused on passing family wealth (meaning the traditional male-headed nuclear family) on to the next generation (of men).  

Rural hegemonic masculinity in Aotearoa was premised on the idea that the creation and maintenance of farming properties was dependent solely on the labour (and managerial skills) of Pākehā men. These men exercised their muscle, controlled land/water/biota or other people, and in doing so performed manliness in order to accumulate material wealth. These avenues of self-development and profitability were not offered to Pākehā women or to the colonised peoples, even when they undertook exactly the same activities.

**Intersections of gender hegemony with those of race and class**

Gender norms were (and still are) culturally and spatially constituted. Our research has identified specific characteristics associated with the performance of rural femininity and masculinity. While gender norms were something individuals living in the Waikato and King Country performed, the consideration of acceptable gender behaviour was the focus of ubiquitous discourses. The contours of suitable gender behaviour were disseminated through social institutions, the legal regime, the educational system, popular culture and religious teachings, and became dominant to the point of naturalisation. It was through these processes of naturalisation and internalisation that specific types of gender norms became hegemonic. Hegemonic masculinity within the rural Waikato and King Country involved the configuration of gender practices that took for granted the privileged position of Pākehā men as farmers, property owners and controllers of nature, money and the labour of others (those deemed subordinate, including both women and Indigenous peoples). Hegemonic femininity, as the work of Mimi Schippers demonstrates, was the ideal of Pākehā womanly behaviour and operated as a complementary relationship to

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64 In contrast, Māori gender norms prior to colonisation markedly differed from those of British and other European societies. Both men and women worked on the land and were involved in cultivating and harvesting foods. While there was gendered division of labour, it varied across tribal areas, and Māori women occupied a variety of positions within their communities, with rank (ranging from slaves to chiefs) often more important in determining what activities people could participate in than gender. However, settler colonialism substantively reduced Māori women’s communal land rights and authority, with the Native Lands Act of 1865, which abolished Māori land rights through matrilineal descent. Although the Native Lands Act of 1869 did contain a clause that allowed Māori women some degree of legal capacity, and women participated in Native Land Court cases, Māori women’s legal rights regarding their bodies, children, lands and finances all diminished as a consequence of settler colonialism. McAloon, ‘Family, Wealth and Inheritance in a Settler Society’; Brookes, *A History of New Zealand Women*; Angela Wanhalla, “One White Man I Like Very Much”: Intermarriage and the Cultural Encounter in Southern New Zealand, 1829–1850’, *Journal of Women's History* 20, no. 2 (2008): 34–56, doi.org/10.1353/jowh.0.0013.
hegemonic Pākehā masculinity and, by doing so, guaranteed the dominant position of Pākehā men and the subordination of both Pākehā women and non-Pākehā men and women.

Within the rural landscapes of the Waikato and King Country, gender hegemony intersected with other subjectivities, most notably those of ethnicity or race, to justify why certain bodies, modes of living and ways of seeing the world were privileged over others. As other scholars observe, Western ontological constructions of race and property played significant roles in the establishment and maintenance of racial and economic subordination by Indigenous peoples. The ‘settled expectations’ of Pākehā privilege (as with other forms of White privilege noted in other settler societies) were founded on connections between race/ethnicity, resource rights and the dispossession of Māori from their lands. The quality of being Pākehā itself was a type of ‘status property’ (to borrow the words of the African American scholar Cheryl Harris) that was reified in law to safeguard unrecognised settler expectations concerning the privileges, advantages, opportunities and power link to the quality of being Pākehā. Accordingly, generations of Pākehā in the region championed the dispossession of Māori from their lands (through various pieces of legislation as well as the operations of the Native Land Court system) on the basis that Māori (specifically Māori men) failed to ‘develop’ their lands, and indeed were incapable of being ‘good’ farmers. In this way, the rural landscapes (comprising thousands of predominately Pākehā-owned farms) of the Waikato and King Country were thoroughly enmeshed in patriarchal settler colonial racial capitalism.

Conclusion

In this article, we examined the gendered behaviours and norms of Pākehā women and men living in the Waikato and King Country from the 1860s to the 1930s. The deliberate consideration of how gender norms shaped the way people perceived and engaged with their environments opens up a completely new area of inquiry. As we evince, in addition to oral histories, public and private collections hold largely unexplored texts written by different genders about their life on farms, in the bush, in and on the water, and in the sky that offer different perspectives. Significantly, our research offers new insights into how gender norms intersected with class (alongside race) to provide the scaffolding of hegemonic masculinity and femininity in the rural creation and maintenance of the Pākehā landscapes.
of the rural Waikato and King Country. Our examination of Pākehā living in the ‘backblocks’ of the Waikato and King Country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries demonstrates how particular configurations of gender practice varied across class lines and were infused with racial thinking that positioned Pākehā at the apex of social, racial, economic and gendered orders. Pākehā women affirmed and defended a version of femininity (which was influenced by British gender norms) and depicted non-hegemonic femininities (including Māori and Pākehā working-class women, Māori, and other non-Pākehā) as inferior, uncivilised and socially unacceptable. The Pākehā and Māori women who undertook farm work, as we outlined in this article, were often labelled by others (both Pākehā men and women) as being unfeminine, undesirable, undomestic and irresponsible with their bodies. Women who, by financial necessity or personal preference, engaged in supposedly manly activities (such as animal husbandry, fencing, logging and shearing) were criticised for being in breach of their duties as wives and mothers (women’s primary responsibility being the care of their families and husbands). The use of social censure assisted in the maintenance of the gender hegemony, as did specific legal and socioeconomic arrangements, which provided mutually reinforcing narratives that justified the privileging of masculinity over femininity, as well as systems of class and racial inequity. In the King Country and Waikato, hegemonic masculinity and capitalism exalted practices that marginalised Pākehā women’s voices and financial independence, which paralleled to some extent the exclusion and oppression of Māori (yet at the same time Pākehā women benefited from Māori dispossession, as did Pākehā men). Yet our study is small-scale, and further research is critically needed to explore this important area of study. In particular, it is vital to consider the ways in which different constructions of masculinities and femininities operated over temporal and spatial scales (as part of systems of gender, class and racial inequities) and influenced how people conceptualised and responded to environmental conditions and changes.

Table 1: List of oral histories examined for this paper

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<th>Archive</th>
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Source: The authors.
Emotional challenges to masculinity in the 1930s Callide Valley closer settlement, Australia

MARGARET COOK
School of Law and Society,
University of the Sunshine Coast;
Honorary Research Fellow,
La Trobe University and University of Queensland

Abstract

When the Callide Valley closer settlement scheme was opened in central Queensland in 1927 its design was based on a gendered rural ideal. A farming man was to be hard-working, stoic and tough, able to withstand the unpredictable climate and environmental conditions to tame the land, build the new nation and provide for his family; acts by which he could construct and demonstrate his settler masculinity, while cultivating the land. Through an analysis of settler correspondence to a Queensland government enquiry in 1934, this article problematises the myths of masculinity in this rural community to explore the emotional and mental strain on male settlers when the environment posed limits to settler economic and agricultural success.

Keywords: masculinity, environmental history, gender, rural history, settler society, Queensland

Introduction

In 1934 a farmer, William Cahill, informed a Queensland government enquiry that

owing to bad seasons and very small return from the land, I have not received enough to purchase food to the average standard of living. This is not all, at times I have not had any money at all and have had to receive Government rations, or otherwise starve.¹

¹ William Vivian Cahill, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013452. Queensland State Archives (QSA), Brisbane.
Cahill lived on a 202-acre farm called ‘Verona’ near Jambin in the Callide Valley in central Queensland where he grew cotton and maize (corn). Like many in the district he was struggling to make ends meet, saddled with debt, and facing constant expenditure and failing crops during years of drought. Hunger and poverty were the realities facing Callide Valley families.

This individual story of the struggle to farm in a subtropical land of drought and floods, where the soil and pests presented constant challenges to settler agricultural endeavours, is indicative of the plight facing many of the region’s farmers in 1930s. Less than a decade earlier, the Queensland Government carved 1 million acres of land in the Upper Burnett and Callide Valley regions (Figure 1) into small agricultural holdings to form a new closer settlement. Typical of the interwar years, the government’s advertisements promoted the region as having ‘unlimited possibilities’, celebrating the ideal climate and fertile soil. This was a place of promise where men who were unafraid of hard work and possessed the characteristics of stoicism and grit would surely succeed. Yet for many in the 1930s, the Callide Valley became a place where the assurance of success proved elusive. The climate would thwart farmers’ aspirations and test the physical and mental fortitude of the settlers. It would also challenge notions of masculinity in rural Australia.

Masculinity is central to settler Australia’s foundational myth whereby men (not women) worked the land, tamed and transformed the environment. In accordance with what John Hirst described in the 1970s as the ‘pioneer legend’, masculine labour ‘was central to the nation-making activity of agricultural settlement’ and stereotypical ‘manly’ qualities of courage, endurance and perseverance were required to survive. More recent scholarship rejects these notions of biological essentialism that categorise men and women into a fixed duality. Most notably, the feminist theorists R. W. Connell and Judith Butler (among others) both maintain that masculinity and femininity are cultural constructs. ‘Gender is performative’, manifested through the behaviour of men, and in this rural settlement in Queensland masculinity was demonstrated by ‘taming’ the land through farming. In his study of masculinity in the nineteenth-century Queensland frontier settlements, the historian Robert Hogg has shown that this was a place where masculine ideals were tested and reworked.

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2 Queensland Government Intelligence and Tourist Bureau, The Upper Burnett and Callide Valley Districts, Queensland (Brisbane: Queensland Government Intelligence and Tourist Bureau, 1925), 5–10.

3 This idea is a central theme in Richard Brome et al., Mallee Country: Land, People, History (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2020), 102.


6 Cultural geographers have been more attentive to rural gender relations, questioning the nature of gender itself and its social construction in rural communities. See Jo Little, ‘Rural Geography: Rural Gender Identity and the Performance of Masculinity and Femininity in the Countryside’, Progress in Human Geography 26, no. 5 (October 2002): 665, doi.org/10.1191/0309132502ph394pr.
Here was a stage on which men could ‘perform’ manliness, in accordance with the hegemonic notions of masculinity. While some conformed, many men could not live up to the ideal. Hogg’s work challenges idealised notions of masculinity, suggesting that these ideals were constructed and perpetuated to foster social cohesion and control, and to maintain the national mythology, rather than reflecting reality.

This article builds on Hogg’s analysis of the pastoralist frontier and examines a second wave of settlement in the twentieth century—the Callide Valley settlement scheme in central Queensland. Here the normative gendered behavioural codes of the nineteenth century persisted, promulgated in the government’s promotional material for the scheme. But men struggled to live up to these gendered ideals and, as I have shown elsewhere, women often undertook physical labour on these farming properties. While Hogg complicates frontier masculinity, my work adds nature’s agency to the male settlers’ difficulties in fulfilling prescribed masculine roles (breadwinner and farmer) and characteristics (strength, endurance, hard work and stoicism). In doing so I engage with the work of environmental historians who seek to identify how human ‘experience is moulded by the landscapes and environments in which people live and labour’. In particular, I am influenced by Katie Holmes’ gendered analysis of settlement in the Mallee region in Victoria and how the land created the so-called ‘Mallee man’. Similarly, this article questions how the environment and climate in the Callide Valley settlement shaped its male settlers, who were not only Britons, and often circumscribed their efforts to perform their masculinity.

In 1934 the Queensland Government instituted a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the Upper Burnett and Callide Valley settlement scheme after the region experienced three years of severe drought, which nearly crippled the project. This was an economic enquiry with a standardised survey form designed and distributed to farmers to collate economic statistics: stock numbers, acreage under crop, yields, gross and net incomes, and assets. A total of 955 settlers returned the form, while

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some respondents voluntarily took the opportunity to write accompanying letters further describing their personal circumstances. These forms and letters, stored in the state government’s archives, offer an insight into the human (and emotional) experience of closer settlement in northern Australia between 1927 and 1934. This article considers the mental and emotional strain on these settlers as they attempted temperate farming methods in a subtropical climate. The historian Rebecca Jones has considered the emotional impacts of drought—the anger, fear, hope and uncertainty shared by many settler farmers in southern Australia—using personal diaries and correspondence. These sources, Jones argues, ‘draw the reader into the writer’s intimate world, providing a portrait of individuals’ everyday thoughts and feelings unmediated by hindsight’. A study of these Queensland farmers’ letters add to our growing understandings of the psychological toll of closer settlement in the first half of the twentieth century.

Written for a government enquiry that was subject to public hearings, these Callide Valley letters lack the intimacy of private letters that correspondents might have written to family or friends. As an historian, I was left wondering about the anguish that may have otherwise been contained in such private letters. As much of the correspondence included a plea for economic assistance, they may disproportionately dwell on their negative lived experiences. While the correspondence cannot be considered ‘begging letters’, as per the Irish charity letters analysed by Lindsey Earner-Byrne, or Thomas Sokoll’s Essex pauper letters, the Callide Valley letters were written to explain straitened experiences and request assistance from the authorities that had encouraged them to settle there. These letters corroborate the power imbalance revealed in the pauper letters—suppliant writers requesting government assistance—and are similarly crafted to present the writer as being of good character and worthy of aid. Like Earner-Byrne’s correspondents, these Callide farmers were self-aware of their identity and the society in which they were writing.

The English language was a further limitation for correspondents, as some were Russian, German, Italian or Albanian, demonstrating the wave of European migration to the Callide Valley during the 1920s. English fluency may have constrained the details correspondents could provide, but the Council of Agriculture attempted

14 Earner-Byrne, “Dear father my health has broken down”, 851.
15 Earner-Byrne, Letters of the Catholic Poor, 2.
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to mitigate this problem by appointing E. Harding (Secretary of the Central Queensland District Executive of the Council of Agriculture) to assist settlers with their submissions. His role was to visit farms, and deliver and collect forms. However, as the responses are handwritten, this suggests that Harding had little direct involvement with the preparation or contents of the submissions. Although the surviving letters may not fully reflect the situation of the correspondents, they nonetheless provide insights into the lives of these farmers by offering examples of voices of ordinary people.\footnote{Tim Hitchcock, ‘Review: A New History from Below’, \textit{History Workshop Journal} 57, no. 1 (2004): 297, doi.org/10.1093/hwj/57.1.294; Martyn Lyons, ‘A New History from Below? The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe’, \textit{History Australia} 7, no. 3 (2010), doi.org/10.2104/ha100059.}

These voices—that is the authors of the forms and letters to the government enquiry—were largely those of male settlers, with a handful of female lessees. Writing of the drought experiences she gleaned from settler diaries from the twentieth century, Jones argues that, in keeping with prevailing gender norms, it was ‘acceptable, even desirable, for women to write openly and reflect on emotional experiences’, but notes a reticence in men’s correspondence to do the same.\footnote{Jones, ‘Uncertainty and the emotional landscape of drought’, 15.} In contrast, these Callide Valley letters do reveal the anguish of men, which is more surprising given that their audience was likely to be other men (government officials assessing a land settlement scheme)—hardly a private space to be sharing feelings of inadequacy or personal hardship. Just as Jones’ letter-writers convey fears of drought, the Callide Valley farmers document the uncertainty of farming in an unfamiliar climate, subject to drought and flood, a land where crops failed, stock died and settlers struggled to survive. Jones’ subject material records the ‘feeling of loss of control and mastery, of helplessness and a sense of futility’,\footnote{Ibid., 19.} emotions evident in the Callide Valley also.

I have used these questionnaires and letters elsewhere to discuss settler understandings of climate, and gender stereotypes in early twentieth-century Australia.\footnote{Margaret Cook, ‘Perceptions of a “Normal” Climate in Queensland, Australia (1924–34)’, \textit{Rural History} 31 (2020): 67–77, doi.org/10.1017/S0956793319000219; Cook, ‘Challenging Gender Stereotypes’.} This article re-interprets these sources to ask: in a culture where men were expected to be stoic, resilient and strong as proof of their masculinity, how did men cope emotionally when their farms failed and strained their physical and mental strength? Some were broken by the experience, while others endured, but it is unlikely that any were unchanged. As this article shows, these experiences informed the written testimonies of Callide Valley men, who articulated the challenges they faced in ways that were contrary to the prevailing masculine ideal of rural Australia.
The Callide Valley

In the 1850s, squatters occupied the country of the Gangulu Nation people and cleared the land for beef cattle grazing. In 1923, under the Upper Burnett and Callide Valley Settlement Scheme, 3 million acres of land was resumed from the pastoralists for a closer settlement scheme, designed to break large pastoral holdings into small leases for working family farms of between 160 and 320 acres (65 and 130 hectares) for agriculture, including cotton production and dairying. This settlement scheme followed a history of similar schemes introduced throughout Australia since the 1860s, including the soldier settlement schemes after the First World War. Common to all such schemes was the desire to populate and improve the unproductive, empty ‘waste lands’ by luring white (ideally British) settlers to the region. The scheme’s design was inherently gendered: hard-working, progressive young men would lease farms, bringing their wives and children, who they would support financially, thereby occupying and taming the land through agriculture to build the settler state.

One million acres were settled in the Callide Valley, an area of roughly 4,400 km² traversed by rivers and creeks. It extended from the Dawes Range in the south to the Don River in the north, bounded by the Calliope Range on the east and the Banana Range on the west (Figure 1). The climate is subtropical, characterised by erratic rainfall, floods and droughts. Within this vast region, the range of soil types includes alluvial, clay (black soil) and sand, with flat or hilly outcrops. By the 1920s, much of the land had been cleared for cattle grazing, although remaining vegetation included areas of scrub that comprised ironbark, bloodwood, box gum, wilga (Geijera parviflora) and belts of brigalow (Acacia harpophylla).

Land was made available through ballot, and settlers rushed to the region in the late 1920s, lured by state government promises of ‘vast areas of fertile land’ that would ‘would grow practically anything’. Promoters of the scheme, perhaps concerned that the land would look unappealing to immigrant eyes, explained that the scrub was ‘not to be regarded as stunted vegetation covering useless barren land’, but a ‘tropical jungle in rich volcanic soil—ideal dairying and agricultural land’. Railway construction in the 1920s created the towns of Goovigen, Jambin, Argoon, Callide, Thangool and Biloela (the region’s administrative hub) with roads, bridges and buildings further altering the landscape. As with all Australian settlement

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20 W. L. Payne, Report and Recommendations Following on an Economic Investigation by the Land Administration Board of the Upper Burnett and Callide Valley Lands (Brisbane: Government Printer, 1929); Morning Bulletin, 20 September 1930, 5. Note that the Upper Burnett lands were further south and were settled before the Callide Valley.
22 W. G. Graham, Under Secretary for Public Lands, 21 February 1919. ID 7937. QSA.
23 Queensland Government Intelligence and Tourist Bureau, The Upper Burnett and Callide Valley Districts (1925), 15–16.
schemes, government conditions were imposed, requiring settlers to undertake
large-scale land clearing, fencing and other improvements, as well as annual upkeep,
or face forfeiture. Hardwood trees became fencing while the remaining scrub was
ring-barked and felled, then burned, destroying the native grasses, as the land
was made ready for agriculture. Cleared and fenced land created a patchwork of
family farms across the region, fulfilling the nation-building vision of successive
state governments to make central Queensland an agriculturally productive region,
populated and defendable against foreign invasion. 24

Figure 1: The Callide Valley, Queensland.
Source: Nick Cook.

24 David Cameron, ‘Closer Settlement in Queensland: The Rise and Decline of the Agrarian Dream, 1860s–1960s’ in Struggle Country: The Rural Ideal in Twentieth Century Australia, ed. Graeme Davidson and
Early settlers relied on dairy cows, pigs and mixed agriculture for their livelihoods. But it was cotton that the government promoted, as the crop was thought to be drought tolerant owing to its long taproot. Cotton required little capital outlay, and as such it was considered a cash crop to supplement dairying and low-scale agricultural production. Although it could be planted on burnt-off scrubland amongst the stumps and logs, ideally the land would be tilled and ploughed, with the seed planted in furrows. Farmers replaced ‘natural grasses’ with ‘artificial grasses’ (to use the nomenclature on the survey forms), as imported Rhodes grass (*Chloris gayana*) supplanted the native Wiregrass (*Aristida* sp.) and Wallaby grass (*Austrodanthonia caespitosa*) as the preferred stock feed.

The local brigalow, with its lateral root structure, ‘defied the axe’ and tested many settlers. If cleared, the stumps of mature trees produced suckers and dense regrowth that proved even more difficult to remove.\(^{25}\) Settlers reported constant struggles with this persistent acacia. In his submission Clarke reported, ‘during the last drought about 80 per cent of the Rhodes grass died out and brigalow suckers got control’, undoing months of tree clearing.\(^{26}\) Similarly, J. A. Shaw, who leased 1,530 acres (619 hectares) at Goovigen, wrote to the Commission of Inquiry:

> Apart from spending all my own money, what I borrowed and what I made on the place in building up the farm, I have had to keep and maintain a family of 11 children; ring barking has not been the success I expected, as now I have to spend more than ever on going over it and taking out the suckers; I also find that after taking 3 crops off a peace [sic] of land it is almost an impossibilité [sic] to keep it clean, to run and keep my place in fair order. I reckon it cost me £3/10/0 per week apart from my living.\(^{27}\)

In Shaw’s own battle with nature, the brigalow was winning. Brigalow thrived in deep cracking clay soils prone to ‘gilgais’, an Aboriginal word for a small water hole, and in this region they were plentiful. The Callide Valley correspondence repeatedly refers to ‘melonhole gilgai’ that helped sustain the drought-tolerant brigalow.\(^{28}\) Shaw’s words demonstrate he believed the environment limited his capacity to ‘keep and maintain’ his family.

Time and experience were to disprove several of the promoters’ claims of unlimited agricultural potential, fertile and watered soil. The grains, tubers and citrus fruit, cited as potentially successful crops, were well beyond the capacity of the land. Before the introduction of irrigation in the 1960s, dairying and dryland (non-irrigated) cotton production depended entirely on rainfall. The farmers’ reports to the 1934


\(^{26}\) A Clarke, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013473. QSA.

\(^{27}\) J. A. Shaw, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013780. QSA.

Commission of Inquiry reveal the trials brought by environmental factors, a litany of problems from too little or too much rain, or its poor timing, as well as deficient soils and harsh temperatures. A major flood occurred in 1928, followed by three ‘good’ years, then successive years of drought and crop failures between 1931 and 1933. Settlers faced glutinous black soil or porous sandy soils. Others had to contend with steep hills, gullies and ‘very stoney’ land, complaining that ‘any heavy rain that does happen to fall just runs away and the evaporation is terrific’.29 Dry seasons rendered the ground too hard to plough and the roads rough. Drought killed grass and entire crops failed, milking ceased, and stock was sold, agisted or died.30 Noxious weeds, by contrast, flourished.31

Heavy rain at times proved equally problematic, drowning stock and crops, sweeping away fences and making roads impassable, which isolated both people and markets for up to four months, especially in areas of bog-prone black soil.32 Some holdings were more prone to flooding, P. Cavanagh recording that his forested area all flooded, leaving the ‘heavy sodden country’ too wet to plant. He lost crops to floods in three successive years.33 Settlers reported that the rains brought ‘pests’, prickly pear (Opuntia and Nopalea spp) and Noogoora burr (Xanthium strumarium), the seeds carried in the flood waters, prevented the pre-season burn of the felled scrub and delayed planting.34 These pests, however, were a product of British colonisation. Prickly pear had arrived on the continent thanks to the First Fleet in 1788, and the burr was imported to Noogoora Station in Queensland in the 1870s, most likely as a contaminant in imported cotton seed.35 Both were spread by humans, animals and streams and took root on cleared land, permanently altering the land and the local ecology.

Stories of drought and flood, poor soil and complaints of suckers, wallabies and other pests are repeated throughout the settlers’ questionnaires and letters, highlighting the agency of nature in a settlement that challenged the survival of both settlers and the settlement scheme. Despite years of hard work, by the early 1930s many settlers lived in poverty-stricken conditions, a situation they blamed on a ‘series of

29 Daniel Smith, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013790. QSA.
31 H. J. Tucker, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013827. QSA.
32 C. Morgan, Jnr, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013665. QSA; E. T. Simpson, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013785. QSA.
33 P. J. Cavanagh, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013465. QSA.
34 L. C. Wallace, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013844. QSA; C. Shelton, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013782. QSA; H. Leighton, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013635. QSA; H. J. Tucker, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013827. QSA.
bad seasons’. These environmental challenges had a dire effect on some settlers, and it is evident that many men considered their failure to provide for their family an abrogation of their masculine duty. Their letters and submissions record their despair, frustration and sense of helplessness.

The lived experience

Due to the unreliable rainfall that looks good on paper, agricultural farming has proved very unprofitable. It makes good farmers the heaviest losers due to the amount of work and expense incurred in proper farming from which they have had no return during the last three years.

This situation, described by farmer Cornelius Shelton, faced many settlers in central Queensland’s Callide Valley in the 1930s. Shelton had moved to the region in 1927, leasing two ‘selections’ or land holdings (436 acres or 176 hectares) 4.5 miles (7.2 km) from the town of Biloela where he and his wife, Eva, grew cotton, maize, potatoes, fodder crops and broom millet, and milked 45 dairy cows.

Shelton recorded that the land proved ‘uneven in quality’, ranging from sand to dark alluvial soil, and they faced frequent floods, with 110 acres (45 hectares) ‘under flood water in any fair year’. Floods came when there was a ‘good coat of grass just before the winter’, leaving it useless and coated in silt. He struggled with Noogoora burr that had infiltrated the watersheds upstream of his property, as every flood brought ‘a fresh supply of burr seed along’ that took root on the floodplain. In the drought years of 1932 and 1933, Shelton recorded financial losses of £23 and £82 respectively, his problems exacerbated by having the additional costs of ‘shifting his cattle to relief country’ as his crops failed. By 1934 he had a £630 bank overdraft and owed £972 to the Lands Department, local shire, storekeeper and Vacuum Oil Company. He maintained that a ‘district which has been subjected to 3 years on end drought should not be classed as a farming district and farmers should not be enticed to the district for that purpose’. In his words, he had ‘a poor chance of making good without considerable concessions’. By 1938, Shelton gave up on cotton, turning to dairy farming in the hope of better results.

R. H. Applin faced a similar plight after purchasing his first selection near Biloela in 1930, and a second by 1931, a total of 476 acres (193 hectares). One selection comprised brigalow scrub, the other timbered with ‘heavy black, melon holy soil’, land covered in gilgais. Applin planted 35 acres (14 hectares) of cotton in both 1931 and 1932 with no result, 18 bales of seed cotton being produced off

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37 C. Shelton, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013782. QSA.
38 ‘Cotton Growing’, Daily Mercury [Mackay], 6 April 1940, 2.
40 acres (16 hectares) in 1933. He produced 20 bags of maize in 1933, but after costs (including crown dues, seed and feed for his eight horses), he recorded no net income between 1930 and 1932, as debts mounted. Applin's original block of 171 acres (69 hectares) could carry one beast per 10 acres, the additional block considerably less. He informed the enquiry that the grazing value of his land was lower than most, as in drought 'a fall of rain has little effect on the black soil which becomes abnormally hard and cracked under dry conditions'. Excessive rain caused bogs, and he wrote: 'It is no exaggeration to say that every time a beast lifts its foot it obliterates an area of grass'. The roads became impassable and prevented access to markets in town. He fared little better in drought, when he was left with 'no grass whatsoever', forced to hand feed his horses until they were sent for agistment. Once dry, the black soil with its 'melon-holy' character made it extremely difficult to break up for planting and it required four years to plough more than one furrow. It was only possible to plant in dry conditions, but black soil dries quickly, and if too dry the seeds do not germinate. Applin informed the enquiry: 'I do not consider it a suitable or really economic soil to use for agricultural purposes but am forced to use a portion of it'. The government sank bores and required settlers to pay for them regardless of success. Farmers considered the cost exorbitant, and water charges, survey fees and rent increased their debt. Applin maintained that the government had made more money from his land than he had. 'Had I been drawing rations' (unemployment benefits), 'I would have been better off'. Only off-farm work and 'the strictest personal economy and sacrifice' had enabled him 'to carry on at all'. He asked to be allowed to sell one of his leases so that he could concentrate on dairy farming.39

Unfortunately, Applin's selection of two portions 8 miles (13 km) apart had contributed to his difficulties in running a profitable farm. What is clear in Applin's story is his depiction of nature's role in his predicament. Drought and flood, he believed, were his main problems, rendering the soil too wet or too dry to be productive. The cost of the government water facility was an ongoing economic strain, but that too could be attributed to unreliable rainfall, as could the failure of the crops and the need for agisting horses. Maintaining horses, cattle and imported crops on this land tested the suitability of both land and farmer. Applin, in his correspondence, is quick to blame circumstances (largely environmental) for any failure, rather than his own inexperience or weaknesses.

Both Shelton and Applin were struggling to survive in poor seasons on blocks that were of questionable agricultural fertility. These records give an insight into both families’ financial strain as they survived on government aid or borrowed money, a situation they considered demoralising. Applin, in particular, questioned his own value, as despite his years of hard work only the government enjoyed the proceeds

39 R. H. Applin, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013405. QSA.
of his labour. But the toll on these male settlers proved more than financial. While few overtly mention their health in the correspondence, some provided evidence of physical and mental strain, providing an insight into the emotional landscape of the settlement.40

One farmer who admitted health problems was Edward Miers. Born in 1895 at Jondaryan, southern Queensland, he served in the First World War and married Alice Gaze (born in Wyandra in 1902) at Drillham in Queensland in 1921. Together they had son, Edward, the following year.41 The family moved to ‘Rangeview’ in Thangool in 1932 during a drought. On his 515 acres (208 hectares), Miers ran dairy cattle and planted a small area of cotton. Apart from an unsuccessful and expensive water bore the government installed and forced Miers to pay for, his ‘chief difficulties lay in the bad run of seasons and the low cost of butter’. He wrote: ‘the last two years have been financially disastrous to me and sickness has been the order of the day for me both with my wife and myself’. He found himself ‘badly in debt to business people’ forced to live on £1 17s 8d (November 1933), £3 4s 9d (December 1933) and £1 1s 6d (January 1934). Conveying awareness of his breadwinning role, he wrote of insufficient funds ‘to live on and keep my family’. Despite illness and debt, Miers remained confident of future success, informing the enquiry: ‘I would very much like to get an extension of time of some kind if no other benefit. With any kind of a fairly good run of seasons I could pull up’.42 His rent was reduced, and as the seasons improved, so did his fortune, and the family stayed in Thangool. Alice died in 1947 aged 45, and Edward in 1958, aged 63, in Yeppoon.43

Miers became the embodiment of rural masculine mythology, whereby men would transform the land, against the odds, through hard work, fortitude and endurance.44 As Holmes shows in the Mallee region of southern Australia, these Callide Valley men were considered the ‘defining emblem of Australian masculinity, the white, heterosexual’ nation-building pioneer.45 Settlers were very likely aware of the masculine characteristics to which they were supposed to aspire and perform. The government’s promotion of the Callide Valley scheme emphasised a gendered rural ideal, where the land would be populated with white, male British settlers full of ‘grit, determination, perseverance, and energy’, and succeed as farmers, husbands and fathers.46 Local newspapers emphasised the toil, vigour, optimism and grit

40 This idea was discussed in relation to drought by Jones, ‘Uncertainty and the Emotional Landscape of Drought’.
41 Australia, Birth Index registration numbers 002699 and 002152; Australia, Marriage Index, 1788–1950, registration number 003133; Electoral Roll, Queensland, 1937, Capricornia, Gladstone, 78.
42 Edward Meirs, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013662. QSA.
45 Holmes, ‘The “Mallee-Made Man”’.
46 Queensland Government Intelligence and Tourist Bureau, The Upper Burnett and Callide Valley Districts, Queensland (1925), 17.
required of settlers.\textsuperscript{47} In 1930s rural Queensland’s patriarchal settler society, the gender ideal was a breadwinning male, with women and children supported by a man’s labour, sweat and toil. Judging by the correspondence submitted to the enquiry, these descriptions offered male settlers their personal barometer of success. This phenomenon of conformity has been noted by Edward Thompson and Patrick Whearty in their study of older men in Massachusetts, which found they adhered to ‘gender scripts’ depicting a ‘culturally idealised form of masculinity’ even when their own experience disproved or defied them.\textsuperscript{48} As the enquiry submissions suggest, settler men in the Callide Valley were all too aware of the expectation to conform to masculine stereotypes.

Nevertheless, the letters reveal that some male settlers, including Joseph Toyne, did not conform. Toyne had worked his 249-acre (101-hectare) farm at Kariboe Creek, Thangool, since 1927, but it proved ‘very rough and broken land with heavy boulders in places’. Despite these conditions, he had 33 dairy cows and was growing cotton, maize and pumpkins. Drought reduced his stock to 15 milking cows together with five horses, three of which died through lack of grass. Toyne owned a hut and shed with a combined valued of £35, but was heavily in debt (£249 to the Agricultural Bank, £50 to the Department of Labour and Industry and about £30 to the Land Administration Board). With his net income falling from £125 in 1929 to £60 in 1933, servicing these loans proved an impossibility. Toyne unrealistically planned to acquire an adjoining property, as his neighbour had been admitted to the ‘lunatic asylum’, leaving his land overrun with dingoes and wallabies that ate Toyne’s cotton crop.\textsuperscript{49}

Borrowing additional money was Toyne’s solution. He requested via the enquiry a further Agricultural Bank loan to instal a water pump to improve the cows’ water supply, which he hoped would enhance their cream quality. Cattle had already polluted the nearby Karaboe Creek and spread Noogoora burr throughout his property. Toyne complained of spending several weeks a year ‘clearing up burrs’, and he requested the rent be halved as ‘we have had four bad out of eight years’. He wished to ‘sell out to anybody at a reasonable valuation’ or alternatively acquire more land, believing a larger holding to be more viable. It seems Toyne entertained any way out of his situation.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Morning Bulletin}, 20 September 1930, 11.
\textsuperscript{49} Joseph Toyne, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013823. QSA.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
Toyne presented himself as a hard-working deserving farmer, failing only as a result of his neighbours, pests or the climate. Meanwhile, his family's circumstances proved too much for his wife, Harriet Alice Toyne (née Winship). By 1932 she could stand it no more, and left. Toyne lodged a notice in the Queensland Police Gazette reporting her missing, ‘with the object of inducing her to return and live with him’.51 His pleas appear to have been fruitless, as by October 1932 police thought Harriet had moved to New South Wales.52 Last seen in Gatton, southern Queensland, in 1934, her subsequent whereabouts unknown, Joseph launched divorce proceedings in the Supreme Court in March 1938 on the grounds of desertion.53 Harriet Toyne’s voice is silent in the correspondence, leaving us only to surmise the unhappiness that forced her to leave her husband and at least one child behind. The year deteriorated further for Joseph when his 16-year-old son, Joseph William Toyne, died on 21 November after being bitten by a brown snake while chipping (weeding) cotton on the family farm.54 Poverty, marital breakdown, desertion and death were likely to have tested Toyne’s expected stoicism and his stereotypical ‘masculine’ roles as a farmer, husband and father.

A sense of personal failure as a father and provider was a common thread in the correspondence to the enquiry. George McKenzie wrote that his family had been living on government relief when he selected a 1,307-acre (529-hectare) block, the £5 deposit lent by a friend. He hoped farming would ‘better’ his position. His wife (Evelyn) and their five children under the age of 11 moved to the region in April 1932, arriving with an axe and a brush hook, ‘not even a tent’. The family survived on weekly government rations, which McKenzie collected in Biloela every fortnight, a two-day walk away. In September his wife fell ill and was hospitalised in Monto, leaving a bill of £8 15s. McKenzie borrowed more money and paid five men too much to fell 50 acres (20 hectares) of scrub. Having been flooded the previous winter, his attempts to clear his field prior to planting through burning failed, and despite hopes to produce 50 bales of cotton, he produced only seven bales of seed cotton and 17 bales of ‘snap’ cotton that was considered low grade. Their sale barely covered costs. The family became reliant on storekeepers’ and butcher’s credit (£25 and £5, respectively). Worse still, McKenzie chopped his foot with an axe, making him dependent on his wife and an employee (an ‘old man’) as cotton pickers. One of his children died, which in part he blamed on himself as ‘it may not have happened if I had a conveyance of some kind’. His debts reached over £400 in 1934 and the family endured ‘hardship’. His letter concluded: ‘I shall have very

51 Queensland Police Gazette, 16 July 1932, 269.
52 Ibid., 1 October 1932, 368.
53 ‘Petition for Divorce’, Evening News [Rockhampton], 2 March 1938, 1.
54 ‘Youth dies from snakebite’, Evening News, 21 November 1938, 1.
little cotton so I cannot see how I am going to pay even private debts’. Left with an injury, grief and guilt, caring for his sick wife and children and unable to meet his obligations as a provider, Mackenzie felt utterly helpless.

Illness also aggravated Joseph Maguire’s woes. His land comprised 1,708 acres (691 hectares) at Thangool, generally poor country, where the scrub provided ‘wallaby dens’. His agricultural efforts having failed, his only income was £1 18s for felling timber. He left his wife and five children in search of work, but was injured by a fall from a horse. Tellingly, he wrote: ‘together with the continual struggle for existence my health has again broke down’. After applying for a loan, Maguire ‘heard nothing’. He explained: ‘for eighteen months we have had no money leaving myself wife and children without clothes or blankets for the coming winter and no prospects’. In accordance with his lease, he requested government permission to pick cotton with his family elsewhere until the loan was granted. The land and poverty had been his undoing. He hoped his application for financial assistance would be considered favourably ‘owing to what myself and family have had to contend with such as depression, drought, sickness etc’. Both McKenzie and Maguire willingly conveyed their physical health problems, but only hinted at the family’s precarious mental state with a mention of depression.

In 1934 the settler O. J. Plant had reached breaking point, crippled with debt, and requested permission to sell up. He had acquired his block by ballot in 1931, an area of 2,370 acres (959 hectares) 13 miles (21 km) from Biloela. He received his monthly cream cheque, but after deductions for the Agricultural Bank and cartage, ‘to say nothing of rents, rates and bank dues’, he could not earn ‘a decent living for a single man let alone a man with a wife and 6 children’. He wrote: ‘I cannot keep things together at £4.13.6 a month so therefore I have no alternative but to get out and look for a living elsewhere and leave my wife to manage as best she can with the cows in the hope that things might brighten up.’ He added: ‘this state of affairs cannot carry on for too long’.

In her work on soldier settlements in Australia, the historian Marilyn Lake notes that absences from the farm risked land forfeiture as the government considered this a ‘moral and economic offence’, a distraction from the core business of managing the farm. In Plant’s case, the government was unlikely to have favourably considered off-farm work, especially when it meant leaving his family to manage alone. Plant could see no alternative. In his mind, all his previous work had ‘gone for nothing and the struggle to carry on this year to get a crop ready [has been] so hard that I feel...
too disheartened and fed up with the whole affair to want to carry on further and I will be much more pleased if you will give me the permission to sell out’. Plant cut his losses and sold his property in February 1938.60 Leaving the land, after investing funds and years of hard work, may have been difficult and felt deeply, but some had no choice.

While many were struggling, some men found the strain intolerable. P. Price, who owned Lilydale, a 475-acre (192-hectare) selection at Jambin, complained to the enquiry that with high rents on a poor class of country, no market and ‘erratic rainfall’, ‘I simply cannot make ends meet’ with existing cotton and butter prices. He faced insurmountable debt—two years’ rental (£32), interest to the Agricultural Bank, £13 in rates and £40 to the stores. He was growing desperate: ‘I don’t see how I am going to carry on, I have tried to sell out, at a gift price, but no buyers, if I cannot get straight this year, well I will walk off, for I am fed up with it’.61 It appears that Price’s stoicism and endurance were reaching their limits, and he saw little choice but to walk away.

It is clear from the language in the correspondence that some men felt the pain of failure acutely. An Italian, R. A. Tognolini (known as Antonio), toiled tirelessly on his farm without success, his inability to provide for his family leaving him deeply despondent. After farming in northern Italy, then Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales, Tognolini selected 210 acres (85 hectares) near Biloela around 1924 with £78 from property sold in Italy and a £100 Agricultural Bank loan. He informed the Commission of Inquiry:

I started in the land with [an] undaunted will to carry the proposition honourably, has it not have been [sic] for the constant help of my wife and children, although as yet young, I am not sure if I could have carried such [a] burden; unnatural I must say in as much as neither man, or women or children should be compelled to keep slaving for so many years, without a break of any kind, living in a hut unfit for the requirements of this climate for the sake of a mere living economising in everything.62

The burden of his hard labour was pushing Tognolini to breaking point.

Until 1930 it had been ‘up hill all the way’, with all money spent on improvements. He had some economic success growing cotton and raising dairy cows and chickens,63 and increased his land to 223 acres (90 hectares). But the economic depression set in, which Tognoloni wrote brought ‘the tragic outlook that neither the man on the land or his produce is wanted, a feeling of over production at one end, and poverty on the other, while exploitation continue unchallenged’. While it is not

60 ‘Biloela’, Morning Bulletin, 10 February 1938, 11.
61 P. Price, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013736. QSA.
62 R. A. Tognolini, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013819. QSA.
63 ‘Mr Antonio Tognolini’, The Capricornian [Rockhampton], 8 May 1926, 49.
clear what specific exploitation concerned Tognolini, his frustration grew. Drought followed, killing his cotton crops and 113 acres (46 hectares) of wheat in 1932, and he was forced to pay to agist cows at Jambin. As the drought continued, five cows died and he had to move the remainder further away. Rain came in 1933, but ‘at the wrong time’, making the work a constant battle. High rents, dues for water supply, Agricultural Bank loans, and living and working expenses proved crippling. His sense of failure was explicit: ‘I have never expected another man to come and attempt where I fail’. In his words, the depression created a ‘tragic outlook that neither the man on the land or his produce is wanted’.

The environment and human experience were at odds with both the rural and masculine imaginary in early twentieth-century Queensland.

**Challenging masculine mythology**

Tognolini used the word ‘failure’, as did the German merchant, Ernst Daniel, on 632 acres (256 hectares) near Jambin. He wrote to the Minister for Lands via the enquiry, explaining his circumstances. Aged 39, Daniel won his ballot block in 1928 and moved to the district with his wife Anne (aged 38) and children Ernst (‘Ernie’, 10), Liselotte (‘Lottie’, 12) and Karl (13). Together, they sought ‘to build up in this wonderful land and now [have experienced] failure for the family and especially the children, after losing [our] old family business and estate through the war and inflation. We all have done our hardest; living very modest with as good as no comfort’ (Figure 2). Despite hard work for five years, he needed help as the seasons (uncertain and irregular rain) had made it possible for an ‘honest and willing man’ to ‘make ends meet’. Daniel felt despondent as he had failed in his perceived parental responsibility to provide for his children. He wrote:

> if one tries every year again, having failure after failure and still sticks to the land and job, it might be understood, that all these disappointments work out not only disheartening but nearly heartbreaking. But still we will go on, trusting to win through if our conditions could be changed.

Daniel requested government assistance, emphasising that his self-described failure was caused by external factors.

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64 R. A. Tognolini, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013819. QSA.
65 Ernst Daniel, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013453. QSA; Morning Bulletin, 5 December 1936, 15; personal communication with their granddaughter, Marlene Brennan.
The Russian-born Vitally Korjenevsky was adamant—‘failure watches for me’.66 In his work on nineteenth-century Queensland, Hogg maintains that while these men did not meet culturally determined notions of manliness, it would be ‘erroneous’ to conclude they ‘failed’ as men. He points to the fluidity and complexities of notions of gender and varied forms of masculinity on the frontier to make his case.67 But in her study of 1990s Australian and New Zealand farming communities, the geographer Ruth Liepins found ‘true’ farmers demonstrated their masculinity by ‘taming’ the land through physical work to make it ‘productive’.68 As the submissions to the government enquiry indicate, the dominant ideal of settler masculinity was difficult to fulfil and many Callide Valley farmers did consider themselves ‘failures’, as they were poor providers for their families.

In Australia’s foundational stories, rural men are portrayed as courageous, stoic and determined to succeed against the elements.69 As Deb Anderson maintains in her work on drought, stoicism in the face of environmental adversity has become central to the nation’s martial mythology of rural ‘battlers’.70 Surviving droughts, floods and pests was not an aberrant test but, instead the norm. As Jones notes, ‘perseverance in

66 Vitally Basil Korjenevsky, Confidential Reports of Selectors. ID 1013617. QSA.
67 Hogg, Men and Manliness on the Frontier, 177–9.
hardship was not only a virtual but an unavoidable reality’. Moreover, as work by the historian Gretel Evans on floods and bushfires reveals, enduring (and surviving) environmental disasters are regarded by some (non-Anglo) migrants as a milestone in becoming Australian. If failure to succeed in the Callide Valley questioned a sense of national belonging in this settlement, the stakes were high. In the mythology of nationhood and linear progress, failure has no role.

For the farmers themselves and the government, failure was not a palatable story. Holmes identifies the narrative trope of ‘heroic masculinity’ in the Mallee, a tale of ‘battling against the odds—both environmental and human induced—and failing through no fault of the individual’. This tale persisted in the Callide Valley. As in Victoria, government propaganda and newspapers celebrated (and inflated) the triumph of the settler. The Queensland Government had invested £2 million in a scheme of questionable success and was unlikely to concede its mistake. Farmers had endured hardship and, despite hard work, were saddled with debt. With the authors of a 1929 Queensland Government report stating that ‘the scheme will not fail for want of a [sic] suitableness of the settlers’, it took a brave (or desperate) man to admit defeat. And yet they did. The settlers, in their correspondence, frequently admit to their own inability to provide for a wife and family, and to turn a profit. Newspapers confirmed these men’s distress, Rockhampton’s Morning Bulletin reporting in 1933 that ‘men who a few years ago, were strong and vigorous are now broken men’, forced to live on relief loans. Despite their hard work and persistence, the climate and environmental factors proved their undoing, their endurance and resilience gravely tested.

The consequences of failure were high. Lessees (usually men) who could not comply with stringent government conditions of land clearance and maintenance faced eviction. Some chose to leave the valley, despite having heavily invested their money, labour and health in the scheme, often leaving with nothing. It is not possible to determine from these records how many walked off their land. For some settlers, the outcome of the enquiry was positive, notations on some files indicating reduced rents in cases considered deserving of assistance. The scheme continued and most settlers stayed, buoyed by the eternal hope of rain and better seasons; these problems were mitigated with the introduction of irrigation in the 1960s.

71 Jones, Slow Catastrophes, 185.
76 ‘Callide Valley’, Morning Bulletin, 1 August 1933, 3.
Conclusion

The capacity of the Callide settlement scheme to achieve nation-building goals of taming the land and defending it with white settler families relied on the importation of farmers capable of hard work, often in adverse environmental conditions. The state government advocated qualities of stoicism, grit and determination; characteristics presented in promotional literature and newspapers as intrinsically masculine and the mark of those men who would succeed on the land. In a culture that measured success in terms of conquering the environment through agriculture, failure on the family farm could be hard-felt. This was more the case where masculine ideals emphasised breadwinning, and performance of these ‘male’ roles was regarded as essential proof of masculinity. The pressure to succeed may have seemed relentless.

The strength of this archival collection of 955 standardised submissions (and the accompanying letters) is its record of the personal accounts of individual settler experiences. Although these were largely economic accounts for a government enquiry, the reader gains an insight into the physical and emotional hardships settlers endured as they sought to meet settler masculine ideals. Success was contingent on the environment—reliable rain, fertile soil and favourable growing conditions—factors beyond human control but exacerbated by poor government policy. Poverty, drought, floods and rudimentary living conditions took their toll. Settlers’ health deteriorated, along with marital relationships. The environmental realities in the Callide Valley challenged the dominant sociocultural myths of stoic masculinity, while delusional promises of guaranteed success placed undue emotional strain on male settlers that compromised their physical and mental health.

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Talking to water: Memory, gender and environment for Hazara refugees in Australia

HEATHER GOODALL AND LATIFA HEKMAT
University of Technology Sydney

‘It gives me peace of mind when I talk to water’—A Hazara woman and refugee, now living in Sydney

Abstract

This article explores the life histories of 12 Hazara women in south-eastern Australia, each of whom arrived from 2005 onwards. It traces the environmental dimensions of their experiences of home, flight and new settlement, with a sustained focus on how water played a role in their journeys. There has been little discussion to date about the gendered relationships to place and environments for refugees, nor on how the well-publicised depictions of refugee journeys are often gendered, although seldom recognised as such. During in-depth oral history interviews, these Hazara refugee women talked about ‘home’ and ‘water’, depicting them as entwined concepts in their recollected early lives in Afghanistan, their long, enforced residence in transit ghettos and their new experiences in south-eastern Australia. The ‘everyday’ and material experiences they recall and narrate about ‘homes’ and ‘water’ in each of these locations of their past and present point not only to the environmental context and implications of their experiences but to the processes of mourning that accompany such traumatic journeys.

Keywords: migration, environmental dislocation, identity, gender, Hazara refugees

Introduction

Seeking refuge is a long and often terrifying process. It is always gendered. Women and men face very different experiences, vulnerabilities and dangers as they flee intolerable conditions of war or persecution, crossing borders in the hope of finding protection. This has involved long physical journeys—across many landscapes—forcing refugees into interactions with the environments they pass through and those
in which they become trapped, as well as the places where they may eventually find safety. Our research has involved extended interviews with members of 10 Hazara households, comprising 12 women and three men.¹

Hazaras are an ethnic group who traditionally lived in Hazarajat, a rural area lying to the west of Kabul city. This part of central Afghanistan encompasses the headwaters of the Helmand River and lies at the western end of the high Hindu Kush (see Map 1). Its best-known places are the agricultural Ghazni Province and the large city of Bamiyan, home of the famed Buddhas dynamited by the Taliban in 2001. Hazaras owned land and farms in Hazarajat as well as participating widely in social networks with non-Hazara Afghans. The more numerous Afghani populations are Pashtun, to the south, and Tajik, to the north-east, with both of whom tensions have existed, related partly to the Hazaras’ Central Asian origins and visible racial differences. Furthermore, there are sectarian differences: most Hazaras are Shia Muslims while the Pashtuns and Tajiks are predominantly Sunni. Such tensions had led some Hazaras to leave Afghanistan decades before the Taliban took power in Afghanistan around 1996. This group had been living in Pakistan, in areas like that around Brewery² Road, a neighbourhood of Quetta (later called ‘Hazara Town’), where they owned houses and engaged actively in the broader mercantile and social life of the country.³ In the decades before 1996, Pakistan had been more welcoming of Hazaras and it continued to offer security for many years after the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan. Eventually, however, as Taliban and similar influences rose in Pakistan, Hazaras found themselves facing hostility there too.

¹ We conducted in-depth interviews with members of 10 separate Hazara households, comprising 15 individuals, aged from 16 to 56. Our community interpreter was a woman, and we organised interviews by word of mouth. Only three interviewees were male. Since arriving in Australia, most have lived in urban areas, but two families live in Wagga Wagga and had travelled to Sydney to visit fellow Hazaras with whom they had become friends either in Indonesian camps or in earlier resettlement locations within Australia. All the names in this paper are pseudonyms, in accordance with participants’ decisions and university ethical requirements. The historical analysis of memory undertaken with Hazaras in Australia, like that with other refugees, has largely been conducted with male narrators. See Denise Phillips, ‘Wounded Memory of Hazara Refugees from Afghanistan Remembering and Forgetting Persecution’, *History Australia* 8, no. 2 (2011): 177–98, doi.org/10.1080/14490854.2011.11668379; Jane Haggis and Susanne Schech, ‘Refugees, settlement processes and citizenship making: An Australian case study’, *Journal of National Identities* 12, no. 4 (2010): 365–79, doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2010.520972.

² Pronounced ‘Browery’ by all the interviewees.

Analyses of migrancy and forced migration to (or seeking of asylum in) Australia have been undertaken for many years, although as Ruth Balint and Zora Simic have pointed out, migration studies have recently expanded greatly. With the influence of international analyses, attention in Australia has shifted from government policy

to the experiences of migrants themselves. This global trend has seen many analyses of gender and migration and, most recently, attention paid to the particularly gendered nature of danger for women in seeking asylum.

The journeys of refugees identified as ‘boat people’ have been widely publicised in Australia, as have those of many Hazaras. The term originated to describe refugees from Vietnam after 1975, arriving in fishing boats after making a long, island-to-island journey through South-East Asia to northern Australia. More recently, most people attempting to cross the ocean to Australia have been from West Asia and North Africa—the WANA region, including Afghanistan—as the last stage of their long escape. The major Australian political parties have competed to demonstrate their support for the harshest border controls and the least empathy for those excluded. In a number of tragic cases, where boats loaded with refugees have sunk

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and lives have been lost, it is the deaths of children and women that have been profiled by the media. Yet the overwhelming number of ‘boat people’ to have risked that sea crossing have been men, and the vast majority detained in indefinite onshore and permanent offshore detention (for their perfectly legal attempt to seek asylum) have been men. The non-gendered term ‘boat people’ has obscured the fact that this is a gendered style of attempting to reach safety in Australia.

Not only is the style of journey very different for Hazara women than it is for Hazara men, beyond this, the circumstances of their journeys sometimes overturn the conventional roles of male and female that shape life in both Afghanistan and—only slightly less rigidly—in Australia.

There has been less discussion to date, however, about the gendered relationships to place and environments for refugees, whether in places of origin, along their pathways of forced mobility, or in their places of settlement. Work on gender and environment among settled communities in Australia has demonstrated the importance of gender in relationships with the more-than-human world. There has also been work on the interactions with and meanings of places held by immigrant groups in south-eastern Australia, notably those around urban Sydney and Wollongong and in some rural areas. However, while gender is raised in these studies, it has not been a focus of analysis, nor has the experience of the whole migrant journey been considered. Yet the different roles of men and women at all points during migrancy and in seeking asylum have environmental implications. These differences will all be shaped by the cultures and histories of the people

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involved, but to contribute to this discussion, we have taken the example of the Hazara experience of material places in their past as well as their hopes and goals for creating relationships to new places.

The ‘nature’ of water

This article considers the gendered experience of forced migrancy in relation to water, which in the landlocked Hazara homeland is entirely recognisable as the natural environment. The area is watered by snow-melt streams: Hazaras fish in their waters and all agricultural and household needs are met from streams or the groundwater wells that are linked to them, from which water is carried—usually with great effort and usually by women. Yet even in Hazarajat, water can take many forms—as fresh water it can be rain, snow or ice, as well as a flowing stream or well water, while as salt water it may be the distant ocean or, closer to Hazarajat, it may be a saline water table. In Australia, where we conducted our research with refugee Hazaras, the experience of water is mediated by the economy and infrastructure. So, too, water in the many places along the journeys of these Hazaras has been delivered in various ways and was of widely varying quality. Outside of Hazarajat, the origins of water in the ‘natural’ environment are harder to see. Yet beyond such physical connections to the more-than-human world, the diversity among human cultures ensures that water, in all these forms, has different meanings.

Sophie Watson, a sociologist who draws on geography and anthropology in her book *City Water Matters*, has explored cultural practices that express meanings with which water is understood. One of Watson’s detailed examples is particularly relevant to the narratives of the Hazara women we interviewed. This is the religious meaning of water as purification, the state known as *tahara*. This is the power of water (only occasionally replaced with clean sand if no water is available), which goes beyond its chemical capacity to dissolve or wash away dirt, but instead is understood to bring people closer to their god. Purification is important in a number of daily practices for Muslims, including Hazaras. These practices need to be taught to children and adolescents, a role often considered to be the responsibility of mothers or other women. Two forms of ritual purification—undertaken by both men and women—are understood in this way. One is *ghusl*, an Arabic term meaning full body washing after particular activities, always shaped by gender, such as sexual intercourse (including ejaculation) or after menstruation. The other is *wudu*,

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the ritualised washing of parts of the body—in a particular order—before prayer, which is required a number of times each day for observant Muslims—five times for Sunni Muslims and three times for Shia Muslims.16

Water used for either *wudu* or *ghusl* in Hazarajat was drawn directly from the streams and was unquestionably ‘natural’—yet in urban areas, including particularly those of developed Australia—this water, from a tap or pipe, may not appear to be part of any natural ‘environment’ at all. Yet it is imbued with the same cultural meaning for the religiously observant—linking it to a deity and to the more-than-human world created by that deity. Other Abrahamic religions observe different practices with water that are nevertheless each aimed at purifying and linking the individual to their god—including mikvah in Judaism, infant baptism by sprinkled droplets of water in Christianity, and baptism by frequent full-body immersion among Mandaeans, preferably in flowing freshwater rivers but, if necessary, in a small, man-made pool.17

A related practice involving both cleansing and purifying is the use of water to clean the anus after defaecation. This is a widely used method of physical and spiritual purification among many religious groups across South Asia, including Hindus and Buddhists. None of our interviewees believed toilet paper to be an effective or ‘clean’ way to care for the body after defaecation—they had been taught to use water to wash their anus and the surrounding skin in order to be completely clean. In Islam, the use of water to clean the body after going to the toilet was spoken about in terms of a religious obligation as well as hygiene, although *wudu* was required afterwards as well to be pure enough for prayer.18

Hazara narrators’ accounts of their journeys from Hazarajat to Australia often included accounts about water, but sometimes they spoke about it in what would be considered to be ‘natural’ environments, such as rivers or oceans, while in others they have spoken about water in household or ritual use. The start and finish of these Hazara journeys—from Hazarajat to the Parramatta River in Sydney or the Murrumbidgee in Wagga Wagga—can be considered to be moving from one ‘natural’ environment to another. Yet the question of water has been raised at many points in the stories about these journeys, not only around identifiably ‘natural’ environments; it has been the flowing, cleansing and culturally purifying qualities of water, whether it came via a stream or a tap, which have mattered to these narrators.

16 Ibid., 170–81. Watson notes that *wudu* is also sometimes spelt as *wudhu*, and she refers to *ghusl* (as it is known in Australia) as *gushi*.
17 Goodall et al., *Waters of Belonging*. Mandaeans are an Abrahamic religious group whose members follow John the Baptist in practising full-body immersion and doing so frequently. Mandaeans migrated from Palestine across the Middle East, with many settling in Iraq. After persecution there, many sought asylum in Australia, currently living in large numbers on the Georges and Parramatta rivers, in areas adjacent to the Hazaras interviewed in this study.
Home, water and place

While water has been a frequent component of all the Hazara interviews recorded about forced migration, the most strongly expressed and emotional memory for interviewees was not about water. Instead, when Hazaras told us how they felt about places they had been forced to leave, they often used the English word ‘home’. This is an important but elusive concept. For many of the women who were interviewed, such ‘home’ places had been lost—either they could never return because they were too dangerous, or warfare had damaged and destroyed their homes irretrievably. Such grief for lost places is the substance of much of Peter Read’s work in Australia, in which he has recorded the memories and the mourning of Indigenous people and many others for the places they loved.¹⁹ We have traced the ways that Hazara women interviewees have remembered the places they called ‘home’—the places they continue to mourn—and we consider how water has been woven into their stories about loved places.

Sean Field has described the way displaced people in Cape Town, South Africa, during apartheid, have recalled the details of places they were forced to leave. Their memories were often fragmented and partial. Field argues that these displaced people had developed ‘frames’ to shape their memories, and ‘home’ was an important frame, giving coherence and explanatory power to what might otherwise have been disconnected glimpses of the places about which they felt so strongly.²⁰ This concept of ‘home’ as a ‘frame’ has been a helpful way to understand how the Hazara women we interviewed could describe very different experiences of the farming lands around Ghazni and still name them—just as warmly—as their ‘home’.

Yet bell hooks has written about quite a different way to understand ‘homeplace’—as a ‘site of resistance’.²¹ She has described how enslaved women in the United States would try to make ‘homeplaces’ safe and empowering places in which their families—and in particular their children—could experience love and security. These were not the home places of ‘cleanliness, comfort and convenience’ that Elizabeth Shove explains developed with the economy and technology of the late twentieth-century Western world.²² Instead, they were the insecure and impoverished shacks of nineteenth-century slaves; yet hooks argues persuasively that many enslaved women made great sacrifices to do the cultural work needed so that their families could resist the hostility they faced every day outside in the world of slavery.

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This concept—of ‘making’ a ‘homeplace’ as a ‘site of resistance’—offers important clues to the ways the Hazara women interviewed for this project have described their lives in the ghettos of Quetta and other Pakistani cities in which they waited out the long years of exile in hostile physical and social environments before their families could come to Australia. This approach may also offer insights into the strategies Hazara women employ today in Indonesian camps, despite being trapped there by Australia’s closed borders. And, finally, it may be usefully applied to conditions in Australia, where continuing insecurity of residence, poverty of resources, and persisting distrust of authorities may make it impossible to make changes to rented houses or gardens—but where it may still be possible to build a site of emotional and cultural resistance.

Ruptures

As the Hazara women interviewees told their life histories, it became clear that their arrival in Australia (for most after 2005) had not been the greatest rupture in their lives. There had been surprises, but they often found Australia had few differences from the urban conditions they had had to live in, often for some years. Instead, for most, the greatest rupture had been the forced abandonment of their farms and all their belongings in 1996 when they fled in fear from Taliban attack to the nearby mountains and then to the ghettos of Pakistan. Their arrival in Australia was a small event compared to that earlier trauma.

Mrs Poladi, a Hazara woman born in 1960, was forced to escape from the Taliban with her eight children around 2000, abandoning their farm and all their possessions. Her children were old enough to run along beside her, but she has described the chaotic scenes as people fled for their lives with nothing other than their children’s cradles tied to their backs, and their infant children clutched under their arms. One of her sons died in this flight, and she has grieved for him ever since.

Mrs Poladi explained that her farmhouse was important to her because she had laboured on it, investing it with her own identity. She recalled (through an interpreter) that she had spent ‘all her younger time, her beauty and her energies to make her home more beautiful by decorating, washing, cleaning, colouring and painting and brushing, mopping’. She had helped to develop the farm too alongside her husband and family, but she had created the house from her very being. Despite the back-breaking labour needed for this farm, Mrs Poladi remembered an idyllic pastoral life with her family’s stock grazing peacefully on the mountainside and their crops picturesquely surrounded by almond trees, fed by fresh steams from springs in

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23 See Appadurai, Modernity at Large for an analysis of ‘place-making’.
24 Mrs Poladi’s interview was conducted in Hazaragi, translated by Latifa Hekmat.
the mountains. Neighbours co-operated with each other, and there were active social networks between members of various groups, including Pashtuns and Tajiks, with ‘unity’ between them all as ‘Afghanis’. Nothing else in Mrs Poladi’s account matches her descriptions of this place, her pleasure in describing its crops and fruiting trees, its clear waters and the rich exchanges between neighbours. As she speaks now of her grief for its loss, she describes it as if it were an unfed orphan, unloved and alone: ‘abandoned, dried, not nourished and all of our hard work suddenly lost in war’.

Mrs Poladi did describe conflicts occurring among neighbours over water, but suggested these were later in the period, when the Taliban were rising in power. This time of growing uncertainty was particularly hard for her as a woman—she graphically illustrated how the Taliban insisted that women comply with full head covering, by wrapping her light headscarf tightly over her face and eyes to show me how oppressive she had found it.

This anxious time suddenly turned into open attacks. Mrs Poladi’s husband was forced to escape after the first Taliban threats. This took pressure off his family, but left them without the defender on whom they had relied. Attacks escalated until finally Mrs Poladi and her children fled too, scrambling into the mountains to hide in crevasses and caves, fearful of discovery. They spent days eating only grasses and herbs, the fodder for animals. With no utensils, they could drink only the water they could raise to their lips in their cupped hands.

Mrs Poladi’s account of the place before her tragic escape is idyllic, but this is not the case with the way Rahima describes farming lands in Hazarajat. Rahima, born in 1993, is much younger than Mrs Poladi, and she describes the farming life from the perspective of a very young girl burdened with the women’s heavy work of carrying water from the mountain spring to water the stock, wherever they had been put to pasture on the hills, but then also carrying water down to the family house.

Her tone was bitter as she called herself a ‘shepherd’, forced to bribe other children to go out with her to pass the time of day while the sheep grazed, before she brought them back to be penned safe from wolves. But her memories of the games they played, the warm summer conditions and clear springs to swim in were almost as idyllic as Mrs Poladi’s account of crops and fruit trees. Winters, however, were very different on the hills with the sheep. The waters were frozen and it was hard to make a hole big enough to draw water, let alone carry it in the cold to the stock and down to the house. Yet Rahima, just as much as Mrs Poladi, talked about Hazarajat as ‘home’.
Rahima escaped with her family in the early 2000s and was not finally sponsored by the United Nations to come to Australia until 2014. She was granted permanent residency and has since then travelled back from Sydney to Pakistan to visit her family, but, as she explained, she had not ever gone ‘home’, nor did she feel that the house she shared in Newcastle was ‘home’.

Mrs Poladi’s memories of Hazarajat as an Arcadian farming land, and even Rahima’s memories of winters with grazing stock, tell us little about the actual state of this area. Any atlas shows it to be a rocky, barren area. The Hazaras had been pushed into it by Pashtun and Tajik hostility. But even for the women like Rahima who recall the drudgery of water-carrying and shepherding, Hazarajat is warmly remembered as ‘home’. Despite their very different fragments of memories, for both Rahima and Mrs Poladi, Hazarajat remains a place of predictability and stability, even if it were not always comfortable. Their memories tell us little of environmental ‘fact’ but reveal a great deal about how they felt about this place. Alessandro Portelli has argued persuasively that, in this way, oral history and memory open insights into the past that are not available in any other way.25

Water is a key environmental element of each of these women’s memories. Whether it is the clear waters of farm or the icy mountain streams of escape for Mrs Poladi, it is clean and flowing water. It was everyday hard work for Rahima, but nevertheless the water she laboured to draw and carry was clean and essential for stock and family. Yet water also carried a powerful message of fear.

Water and danger

When Rahima and her family escaped with two related families, trying to get into Pakistan, they headed south for Quetta, so they had to pass through Kandahar. Yet after 1996, Kandahar was the headquarters of the new Taliban authority controlling all of Afghanistan. It was difficult to avoid because it lay on the major road leading to Pakistan, so passing through there meant risking the checkpoints manned by young hotheads bristling with weapons. The families were particularly concerned because the Taliban were believed to rape young women, and they were most anxious to hide their daughters. The young girls of the three families were pressed down underneath a blanket between the legs of Rahima’s uncle and other relations sitting in the back seat of their vehicle. The girls were not even allowed to raise the blanket to see what was happening. But they could hear every word, which was perhaps even more terrifying. And they were thirsty! For Rahima, the girls seemed to be trapped there for hours in the heat as the young Talibs tongue-lashed and physically slapped her.

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relations. Despite being humiliated, they never revealed the presence of the girls. Rahima was terrified—and as a 10-year-old, her thirst amplified her fears, leading her ever since to associate thirst with danger.

These two escape narratives played out very differently in terms of the gender order in which both Mrs Poladi and Rahima were embedded in Hazarajat. Rahima’s story points to the sexual vulnerability of refugees, which is widely documented. While sexual violence does have an impact on men and boys during warfare, it is more commonly the case that women suffer sexual vulnerability, sexual attack and sexual exploitation during escapes and in transit camps. While Rahima’s ordeal was terrifying, her older male relations were able to fulfil the roles they were expected to play by protecting the young women in their families from sexual predation.

Mrs Poladi’s experience, on the other hand, disrupted the expected gender order—as it did for many women and families who felt abandoned by husbands and fathers who had been forced to flee earlier. Mrs Poladi’s husband had been forced to leave her and the children alone. They had no idea where he was or even whether he was alive or dead. Mrs Poladi had lived all her life with the expectation that her husband would fulfil the role of provider and protector. But his absence meant she was absolutely alone when she and her children had to make a desperate escape from their home. In this terrifying flight into the mountains, she had to make all the decisions—and to carry all the tragedy after the loss of her son. Then when they finally reached Quetta, it was Mrs Poladi who had to work out how to provide for her remaining children.

This story was repeated by virtually all the women to whom we spoke. Some families decided against the terrifyingly real dangers of Kandahar and instead paid exorbitant sums to people smugglers to get them across the border via other locations. Once they had crossed the border, some families found temporary shelter in Karachi or Islamabad, but many settled in Quetta, nearer the border. But wherever they were, they then had to make agonising decisions about how to proceed—and the fear of gendered vulnerabilities ensured that it was invariably husbands, fathers or sons who made those long, perilous journeys onwards to try to find a safer place to which their families could escape.

For the public in Australia, it is the men’s journeys that are better known. They faced first a difficult journey on foot or by boat, needing to pay smugglers all the way and moving through a series of transit camps, to get to Malaysia. Then they travelled south through Sumatra to the Sunda Strait, between Sumatra and Java. From there, after more waiting time in transit camps and paying more people to source boats, these refugees became ‘boat people’, paying exorbitant fees to board what were often fragile fishing boats and then setting south, across the eastern Indian Ocean,

26 Keygnaert et al., ‘Hidden violence is silent rape’.
heading for Christmas Island, known to be Australian territory, or, much further, to
the Australian mainland itself. In these fearful journeys, water is crucial for asylum
seekers in two ways. First there is thirst: there is so little room on these overcrowded
boats that food and drinking water are rarely adequate. Then the refugees have
to cope with the dangerous waters of the sea itself—even though Christmas
Island is close to Indonesia, the waters around it are treacherous, challenging even
experienced seafarers in serviceable craft—and these refugees seldom have either of
those benefits. If they make it to Australian territory now, they are rapidly shipped
offshore to indefinite detention. A decade ago, these men would face detention in
mainland Australia, but were eventually able to seek protection visas and, perhaps,
bring their family out to be with them.

Australians know little about the lives of the women and children for whom these
men were risking their lives to seek safety. It is in those Pakistani cities of first refuge,
like Quetta, that women and children were left behind in what seemed like relative
safety compared to the dangerous sea crossings. There, in the ghettos, they struggled
on alone to keep their children alive and get them educated. They were often
stranded there for years—some of the women we spoke to had been 13, 15 or even
20 years in Pakistan—most with very little idea of whether their husbands, fathers
or sons were safe, or even where they were. Each of these women described cities
where Hazaras were crowded into what had become a tightly packed slum, living
on top of each other, sometimes in rented rooms in the houses of more established
Hanza owners, and at other times sharing rooms with a number of families in order
at least to find shelter. Yet they had nowhere else to go.

In Quetta, Mrs Poladi struggled to keep her family together and safe, to create
a ‘homeplace’, driving herself to make a living by endless sewing. She made clothes
on a treadle machine and then spun yarn for the rest of her waking hours to try
to raise enough money to feed them all and to get them as much schooling as
possible. Her children remember her ceaseless work to bring in enough cash for
them to survive.

‘Homes’ lost to the past

Yet there were other Hazara experiences. For Elaha, Pakistan had been a very
different place. Elaha had been born in 1993, like Rahima, but in Quetta because
her family had already been there for decades. It was Pakistan that Elaha called
‘home’. She described a place of great freedom, where she and her friends travelled
across the city to go to school and had felt comfortable wherever they went. Even
as young children, she remembered a sense of belonging and confidence in moving
around the city. This had begun to change in her lifetime. By the time she was in
senior high school, Quetta had closed down for Hazaras, because of rising hostility
from Pakistanis. So instead of feeling comfortable everywhere, she could now only
move around safely and easily inside the areas around Brewery Road, which had become little more than a ghetto for Hazaras. It is not clear from her memories when this occurred, and whether she felt it was a result of the influx of escaping Hazaras causing an increasing resentment of refugees, or whether it reflected rising Taliban power and intolerance inside Pakistan.

Elaha remembers Pakistan turning against Hazaras and, as a result, her world shrank dramatically to the closed, foetid, overcrowded space of Brewery Road. When, much later, she came to Australia to marry Faiz, whose family had fled from Hazarajat, Elaha was escaping also—not from the Pakistan she had loved and still remembered as ‘home’, but from today’s Pakistan, in which she no longer felt ‘at home’.

**Exile: Water, home and responsibility**

While for many interviewees, clean water in Hazarajat was central to memories of ‘home’, water had not been so perfect for all Hazara Afghans. Some interviewees had lived in Kabul or other large towns and had experienced piped water under government control. Reliable water was only available through these pipes to government employees and those in the buildings in which those officials lived. This type of corruption was familiar from Afghanistan, but when our interviewees reached Pakistan and were forced to take refuge in the overcrowded ghettos, the situation was far worse. This was where they tried to make the ‘homeplace’ about which hooks has written, to offer not only safety but also resistance to the dehumanisation of war and dispossession.27

Water was central to making safe places, in both health and cultural terms. Yet in Pakistan, they faced centralised, unreliably maintained water systems, so overstretched that supply was irregular. The Hazara women had been aware of corruption existing in Afghanistan, but in Pakistan, as hostility to them rose, they encountered even more intrusive corruption, particularly as the lucrative bottled water trade expanded. Piped water was rationed, flowing only on two or three days each week. In drought periods, even this water did not flow, and large sums of money had to be paid to get water delivered from tankers. Back in Hazarajat, women had had to carry water by bucket from often distant wells, yet they remember it fondly in comparison to the water supply in Quetta, which they say was intermittent, unreliable and inadequate. Even worse was the bacterial contamination of government water sources—whether piped or in tankers—it all had to be boiled before drinking. This impacted most heavily on Hazara women—they were the ones struggling to make these ‘homeplaces’ for their children in the uncertain and overcrowded temporary refuges in which they were waiting till they could move to somewhere safer.

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27 hooks, ‘Homeplace’.
Nevertheless, there was much more stability in another dimension of women’s experiences in making such ‘homeplaces’ for their ruptured families in these ghettos. Hazaras, as Shias, shared common practices with Sunni Pakistanis in using water for religious purposes to purify the inner person. As a result, *ghusl* and *wudu* could be sustained, allowing these stranded women to feel they were continuing to teach a strong cultural identity and practice to their families.

Such symbolic uses of water were a recurrent theme for each interviewee, and it was clear that, despite the problems with contamination and irregularity of supply in Pakistan, it was still possible to maintain many such religious practices involving the use of water. The women struggling to maintain an income, like Mrs Poladi, were still able to fulfil the role they saw for themselves of making a ‘homeplace’ for their children by teaching them about the correct ways to use water. But this was to change when they finally came to Australia.

**Migrating**

Mrs Poladi and her husband by chance found each other in crowded Quetta. She did not wish to be interviewed about her feelings, but a relation later explained that she had vented her intense anger and bitterness towards her husband, an outpouring of all the tragedy and struggle she had had to go through for so many years on her own. Before the family left Quetta, however, there had been some reconciliation, and now, from Sydney, the children stay in regular touch with their father through the internet. Mrs Poladi has passed through all the hurdles to gain permanent residency for herself in Australia, and is now seeking to sponsor her husband to make the journey to Australia.

Among the women we interviewed, few had made the precarious sea journey with the men in their families. These men had eventually been able to claim ‘family reunion’ visas in Australia, so the women’s journeys were rapid, safe and uneventful.²⁸ Their initial impressions also were positive—after the insecurity of Quetta, Karachi or Islamabad, it was a relief to many simply to be in a more stable place, no longer facing hostility and danger.

The women all mentioned the extraordinary experience of being able to roam the area around their new homes at will, of being comfortable anywhere. None were particularly interested in seeking out any pleasant places, but instead talked about the enjoyment of the lack of constraint, of spaciousness. Immigrants from the WANA area who have lived longer in Australia have talked elsewhere about an awareness of racism and of the rising Islamophobia in Sydney, which had increasingly

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²⁸ Eerily like the magic realist transition from the homeland to London, about which Mohsin Hamid writes in his novel *Exit West* (New York: Riverhead, 2017).
constrained their movements.29 The Hazara interviewees, far more recently arrived, felt no such discomfort yet, and instead, particularly among women, talked with surprise and enjoyment of a freedom of movement. For those like Elaha, from Hazara families long established in Pakistan, this recalled their earlier life there, which they remembered as enjoyable because it was more ‘modern’ than Afghanistan, but which had now been lost to them. For the Afghani Hazaras, the freedom of movement that women were experiencing in Sydney was new and welcomed.

Yet, as Doreen Massey has pointed out, places are nodes in networks of meaning.30 These Hazara women made clear the affinity they sustained to the places they remembered. In one example, Hazara residents have created a new name for Auburn Park in western Sydney, which they call Ajia Park. In Hazaragi, Ajia means a place in which older Afghan Hazara women gather to pass the time. Local Hazara residents now refer to Auburn Park among themselves with this new name because it suits their practices, recalling places in their homeland. Offering a reassuring sense of peace of mind and confidence, such renamings are occurring for many different types of places, not only parks but rivers and beaches as well as frequently used buildings like homes and mosques.31

Not all Hazaras had been resettled in urban areas. Most refugees had paid so much to people smugglers and other corrupt officials along their journey, that they had few options but to accept whatever resettlement was offered. Even for those originally from rural areas, Australian rural conditions bring little that is familiar. Australian contract harvesting, for example, is very different from the family and community labour on small holdings in Hazarajat. This system disrupted gendered relationships to employment and land even further than the journey had already done.

Water in Australia was problematic too for Hazara women, whether urban or rural. They welcomed finding that water was not rationed but instead flowed constantly, and that you could get hot water without building a fire. They were positive about finding that they did not have to boil water before they drank it as they had had to do in the ghettos. Yet many of the women we interviewed still did boil water because—they say—it tastes better. The water in Australia tastes ’like chemicals’. Hazara women said it reminded them of the taste of rusty pipes in Quetta, despite being told that the taste in Australia came from chemicals understood to be beneficial, such as fluoride. After so many years living in hostile exile in urban ghettos, these women deeply distrust the government agencies that provide water. Some do not believe, for example, that desalinated water is not recycled sewage. Keeping families safe in this situation poses challenges for them, and is one of the reasons they keep on boiling water.

29 Byrne et al., Placemaking.
30 Massey, ‘A Global Sense of Place’, chapter 6 of Space, Place and Gender.
31 Latifa Hekmat, participant observation in Auburn, west Sydney.
This distrust and insecurity is not surprising. Most Hazaras in Sydney still have only uncertain visas, and little income, so they need to live in rented houses—and a city like Sydney is high cost.\textsuperscript{32} One problem is the plumbing in Australian bathrooms: there are generally no taps close to toilets nor are there usually hand-held bidet ‘bum sprayers’ (\textit{shattaf} in Arabic) that allow water to be accessible for anal cleansing. Renting homes for many years, Hazara settlers find that landlords are reluctant to allow alterations to bathroom plumbing to make living more culturally and religiously appropriate. Some women have rigged up soft hoses to allow water to be drawn from the cistern for cleansing, although most use the traditional small spouted jug, widely known as a \textit{lota} or \textit{bodna}.

Cooking is a further area of difference and challenge. In Wagga Wagga, one Hazara family—led by the father—has built a small hothouse, to grow the herbs that might make food taste more like home. This too requires water, and is a joint strategy in which both the wife and husband can participate together, in ways not needed in Hazarajat, to create meals that, as the wife explained, will be ‘good for remembering’ about life ‘at home’.

**A grievable place**

For some—like Mrs Poladi—there is a continuing desire to find ways in their new homes to express their feelings for their old homes. The grief about those unwatered fields, created with so much labour but now left dry and unnourished, is matched by grief for the lost homes, made and cleaned with so much work (work by women, using water). Mrs Poladi recalls returning home for a visit when her Australian residency was finally secure:

> After a long time, I went [home] and when I saw it, I remembered that I used to clean and paint the walls and decorate it with my embroidered curtains. Now those walls are collapsed [and] not there any more. Nothing remained as before. Everything ruined. It made me cry and I couldn’t sleep.

There has been little space in Australia to grieve for the powerful imaginaries of the homes that have been lost. This is cultural work, like Arjun Appadurai’s ‘making places’, which is crucial in sustaining social and affective links between people and the places they respect and care for. The need to grieve, to mourn for the lost places, and to be acknowledged and respected as someone who is in mourning, is to offer a process of building identities around new places.

\textsuperscript{32} In the present day, Hazaras are still being threatened by federal government immigration policies with deportation—called ‘repatriation’—to Afghanistan. ABC RN Breakfast, 26 November 2018, www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/breakfast/hazaras-in-australia-hear-tales-of-murder-and-displacement/10553384, accessed 12 March 2021. Even when Hazaras hold more permanent residency, their past experiences lead them to feel insecure and anxious much of the time.
Mrs Poladi has described her grieving process as being the way to connect her new home to her old home, which may be lost forever now, but is able to be evoked. She does this by ‘talking to water’, believing that it listens to her, and takes her pain and grief from her shoulders. This has an important positive role in Mrs Poladi’s life, just as the fulfilment of a mourning process, however long or short that grieving might need to be, can be an important contribution to healing and renewing of life.

As translated from the Hazaragi, this is how Mrs Poladi works through her sense of loss, by connecting to God through water. It is the water that allows her to build these imaginative and affective links.

Interviewers: Do you go to parks to go near the water? Is the river important?

SP: I enjoy water. You know, when I go there, I go and talk to water.

Interviewers: About what sorts of things?

SP: Oh … God is so great that give[s] us this much water that I can see and I can enjoy, you know, we can drink this water, give us life. You know, just going to spiritual talking. I am talking to the water, ‘Thank you, God, you know, you have been giving us a lot of things, very important things, it’s very clean and make[s] us clean.’ So, he have [sic] given us this great things.

Interviewers: Do the rivers here, in Merrylands, Parramatta, do the rivers here remind [you] of rivers at home, or are they different?

SP: In Afghanistan I heard that more than half of the world is water, you know. So when I see the water here, I can remember in Afghanistan we used to have it where the water was very speedy, you know, it was moving water and here it’s very static, it just stays. In Afghanistan water is fresh, it was fresh water, but here it’s a bit black, you can see different colours. Yeah. Colourful water.

Interviewers: So, it seems very different, but you still feel able to speak to the water here?

SP: It gives me happiness, it gives me peace of mind when I talk to water.33

Her words suggest that she is making new senses of belonging with which to analyse mobility and migrancy. In Mrs Poladi’s case, she was seeking to reconcile her love of her idealised but lost ‘home’ in rural Hazarajat with the new Australian rivers through a connection to her god. This might build the emotional bonds that bring her new place into connection with her lost place where she felt she was ‘home’.

This is grief that accords respect to the places that have been lost but also opens up ways to build new bonds. There needs to be space for such grief within the policies and practices of land and river management in Australia, which have shown

33 Mrs Poladi’s interview transcript, held by the authors.
little recognition of what immigrants may bring to their engagement with their new homes. Yet the necessity of such mourning has been written about movingly by Judith Butler and Bonnie Honig, who each argue that such mourning holds out the power of hope. This is just as much the ‘place making’ about which Appadurai writes as the pleasurable family gatherings and picnics recognised as ‘making places’ and new connections to environments in the places of new homes. For Mrs Poladi, it has been the complex emotional and spiritual relationship she has with water which offers hope to rebuild a sense of being ‘at home’.

**Reflections in water and memory**

Oral history and memory have been important tools in learning about the experiences of forced migration. Yet the dangerous circumstances into which asylum seekers are forced as they cross borders to find safety are shaped at every point by the different vulnerabilities of men and women. For those Hazaras who do find safety in Australia, these journeys have been very long—often separating families over years or even decades, with little communication possible and vastly different experiences for all involved. Consequently, the memories of conditions over those years, in different environments, with different resources and different fears, will necessarily vary widely. There is virtually no ‘official’ record of these journeys, and so studies of refugees who have reached Australia have to be based on oral histories or autobiographies, which, to date for Hazaras, have mostly been about the experiences of men. Yet as can be seen in the memories of Mrs Poladi and the other Hazara women considered in this article, seeking asylum often meant that men and women in families were separated for many years in different places and had very different experiences. It is essential, therefore, to gather the stories of both women and men who have been through such challenging journeys, simply to learn about how different those experiences might have been. Only then is it possible—but still just as necessary—to consider how gender has differently shaped their memories of ‘homeplaces’ and of the many environments they experienced, even when together, through those journeys.

34 Byrne et al., *Placemaking*.
36 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*; Byrne et al., *Placemaking*.
37 With regard to journalism, of the 12 biographies of Hazara refugees written by Abdul Karim Hekmat published in *The Saturday Paper* from 2014 to 2018, eight were about men and the other four were generalised statistical analyses: www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/contributor/abdul-karim-hekmat, accessed 5 December 2020. See the previously referenced scholarly analyses: Phillips, ‘Wounded Memory’; Haggis and Schech, ‘Refugees, settlement processes and citizenship making’.