# Table of Contents

## Special Section: Minor Histories of the Pacific

Editors’ Introduction .................................................. 1  
*Sudesh Mishra and Russell Smith*

‘Bending Closer to the Ground’: Girmit as Minor History ........ 5  
*Sudesh Mishra*

‘Strange Disclosures’: The Story of the Criminal Forger and  
Absconder, Elias Rosenwax and his Capture in Levuka by  
‘Evarama, the Native Fijian Policeman’, 1871 .............. 19  
*Nicole Anae*

From Whakarewarewa to Oxford: Makereti Papakura and  
the Politics of Indigenous Self-Representation ............ 35  
*Mandy Treagus*

Between Women: Indenture, Morality and Health ............ 57  
*Margaret Mishra*

Bread and Breath: Two Reflections on the Ethics of (Doing)  
History ................................................................. 71  
*Rachel Buchanan and Maria Tumarkin*

Totaram’s Ghost .......................................................... 91  
*John O’Carroll*

Rip Van Winkle in Fiji ................................................ 107  
*Adrian Mayer*

## The Ecological Humanities

Introduction and Farewell ........................................... 137  
*Deborah Rose and Thom van Dooren*

‘The Shape of Things to Come’: Seven Theses on the  
Anthropocene and Attachment ................................. 139  
*Ben Dibley*

‘There Must be Decision’: Climate Change Justice .......... 155  
*Nick Mansfield*
Only Planet: Unsettling Travel, Culture and Climate Change in Settler Australia
Alice Robinson and Dan Tout

Pyric Other, Pyric Double: Fire Tame, Fire Feral, Fire Extinct
Stephen J. Pyne

Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany, by Matthew Hall;
Reviewed by Lorraine Shannon
SPECIAL SECTION
MINOR HISTORIES
OF THE PACIFIC
Editors’ Introduction

Sudesh Mishra and Russell Smith

This issue of *AHR* takes as its focus variations on the theme of minor history. Sudesh Mishra reminds us that minor histories are concerned not so much with excluded events as with events that are included within major historical narratives as exceptions to the norm. They constitute asides, snippets and fragments that depart from the dominant account. Since they are dangerous supplements, they are openly acknowledged in the major account but as exceptions that do not upset the rule. The figure that best captures this idea is the footnote. Set below the bar of the dominant account, the footnote has the potential to lead an argument astray. To defend against this possibility its exceptional status is duly recorded, but with a view to clinching precisely this fact—its exceptionality in the face of the non-exceptional event unfolding in the upper body of the argument. The footnote is visually and discursively disbarred from the dominant account. It is, therefore, that which is excluded at the moment of inclusion. Mishra’s paper elaborates on this notion by examining *girma*—a term coined by Indian coolie workers in Fiji to describe their ordeal in cane plantations—as the history of an exception vis-à-vis dominant accounts of indentured labour; he proceeds to show how an insane vagabond roaming the streets of Suva in the 1880s enters history as the figure of an exclusion because of her condition of unreasonable exceptionality; and concludes his account by noting that a coolie prisoner’s ‘wind’ breaches penal regulations in another instance of minor history.

Nicole Anae sets her sights on a different species of minor history. Her essay takes as its focus an *itaukei* (indigenous Fijian) constable, Evarama, who famously apprehended and escorted the defaulting absconder, Elias Rosenwax, to Melbourne in the 1870s. While abroad, Evarama subverted static representations of indigenous corporeality and material cultures by mobilizing his considerable physical and cultural agency. Evarama, whether wittingly or otherwise, used his status as minor celebrity to break down stereotypical ethnographic representations of the *itaukei* by assuming multiple roles: ‘native,’ constable, champion swimmer, diver, etc.

Writing in a similar vein, Mandy Treagus employs the tactic of recoupment in her article on Makereti Papakura, a Maori performer, tourist guide, traveller, emigrant, cultural custodian and Oxford-trained anthropologist, who happened to straddle two centuries (1873-1930) and cultures. Treagus’ nuanced reading of
Makereti’s fluid engagement with Maori heritage and European modernity leads her to conclude that, in this instance at least, individual agency is inextricably bound up with tribal Te Arawa concerns.

Whereas Anae and Treagus focus on individual agency in their account of hybridity, self-representation and resistance, Margaret Mishra chooses to focus on an early manifestation of women’s internationalism as exemplified in the transnational networks initiated by Indian, New Zealand and Australian women to improve the lot of women labourers in Fiji. Militant forms of resistance employed by indentured women were, Mishra argues, differently complemented by the committee that emerged from the transnational activity of middle-class women residing in the three colonies. Although the activities of this committee were bound up with patriarchal moral categories (honour, chastity, monogamy, etc.) and dovetailed with the politics of colonialism, Christianity and Indian nationalism, the committee’s intervention led to an improvement of women workers’ rights in the areas of health care, education and employment. The transnational women’s lobby was effective partly because it mimicked colonial, patriarchal and nationalist values and structures to influence policy matters in Fiji.

In their dialogic collaboration, Rachel Buchanan and Maria Tumarkin reflect on alternative ethical ways of ‘doing’ history. They seek to move away from the notion of the archive as a repository of selective records and from the idea of history as a bloodless narrative built around recuperated data. They point out that the past announces itself in multiple ways—in everyday metaphors, gestures, habits, asides and through corporeal traces and emanations. They adduce two striking examples to illustrate their point. The first concerns the critical trope employed by a Maori woman at a thesis presentation ceremony. The trope—‘taking bread from our mouths’—returns this figure of speech to its original place of material realization in the 1881 encounter between bread-offering Maoris and gun-wielding white colonists. Is an academic dissertation a form of bestowal or an act of expropriation? Is scholastic bread bequeathed as a gift or is it a form of appropriation? Does academic discourse repeat the original violence of history in another guise? Their second example, mounted against the tradition of disciplining memory and debunking archival narratives, draws on Derrida’s notion of the crypt as a place of unspoken secrets and violent histories. A grandmother’s compulsive habit of harvesting breadcrumbs testifies, symptomatically, to the encrypted history of the Ukrainian famine of 1931. Buchanan and Tumarkin offer other ways of taking note of minor and seemingly throwaway details in order to generate histories that refuse to discount the corporeal, the psychic and the everyday.

Drawing on Derrida’s work on hauntology, John O’Carroll contends that writing is a type of spectral emanation and transmission that outlives periodicity.
He points out that historical subjects—and his exemplary figure, Totaram Sanadhya, spent two decades as a coolie worker in Fiji—survive their deaths through the contingencies of conjuration and haunting. As becoming-bodies, authorial spirits haunt the future of writing just as ghosts haunt the future from which they are absent. Sanadhya’s writings, conceived as historical ephemera at best, evade their transitory status, escaping the ‘synecdoche of a dimension of … [the] scene of [indenture]’, by haunting different futures, authors, memories and genres. O’Carroll argues for the ‘lingering evanescence’ of Sanadhya’s legacy and shows how it continues to haunt the works of contemporary historians, fiction writers, cultural theorists, playwrights and poets.

Adrian C. Mayer, too, is concerned with memory-work in the article that concludes this issue. His strategy is to juxtapose the memories of his several visits to Fiji, the earliest being in 1950 and the most recent in 2010, grouping them together to chronicle the changes and temporal shifts that have occurred in the island’s rural settlements and families. The overlapping memories, and their tenuous connection to ground-level reality, generate a sense of unreality for the remembered pasts as well as the unfolding present. The distinguished anthropologist finds himself outside all timeframes with the result that reality itself appears uncannily unreal to him. While speculating on the tricks and ruses of memory, Mayer’s essay, which is part-autobiography, part-scholarship, part-gift and part-valediction, affords an invaluable description of the transformations that have taken place in Fiji’s economy, demography, dwelling places and life-worlds since the 1950s.
This essay begins with a set of questions. What happens to indenture history when those subject to its logic describe it from their own perspective by coining a new term? What are we to make of an insane Indian woman whom history notices, and admits into the archive, only because she breaches the mental and spatial regulations of those responsible for making history? Is it possible to grapple with a history where the breaking of wind by a prisoner at 8pm constitutes a punishable offence and is duly recorded? ‘The ordinary apparatus of historiography’, writes Ranajit Guha, ‘is most at ease when made to operate on those larger phenomena which visibly stick out of the debris of the past’ and ‘tends to ignore the small drama and fine detail of social existence, especially at its lower depths’ (138). My questions do not relate to the ordinary apparatus of historiography. They concern those phenomena that lie half-forgotten in the lower depths and are deemed to be minor because they have failed the test of significance inside the major event. To answer them we have to descend into the lower depths of indenture history.

Minor history is not defined by the absence of momentous events; it is characterized, rather, by the presence of quasi-events, or events whose eventful status is in dispute, inside the theatre of major history. It is made up of small dramas that inhabit the lower depths in the guise of footnotes, fragments, anecdotes, digressions, fleeting testimonies, parentheticals, curious asides, affective depositions, and the like. They form the strange detritus employed in the large-scale drama of history, but remain slightly at odds with and aloof from the series driving the main plot. Hence they are excluded in the very act of inclusion. Seen as so many bumps on the road, they are not expected to alter the course of the journey or the intended destination. Yet they exist as part of the road and in cross-purposeful relation to it. Sometimes, too, they wait dumbly in archival crypts, and, when summoned, turn into spectres or the becoming-bodies of possible events.1 The marginalia of history, since they lack the eventfulness proper to serial events that link up to form the major story, operate like subconscious entities, interrupting the series in its inexorable pursuit of an argument. Quasi-events fall below the bar of the main narrative by dint of their questionable relevance as events proper, and their most obvious exemplar

---

1 Jacques Derrida describes the spectre as ‘becoming-body’ with ‘neither soul nor body, and both one and the other’ (6).
is the footnote. A footnote has the potential to lead a thought astray, but, if not posited at the bottom of the argument, brings into view the stray thought in all its privation. Banished to an area below the bar, to the hinterland of the thesis proper, it remains tantalizingly in touch with the argument, tempting it with wayward thoughts, contrary assertions and radical departures. The footnote is the dangerous supplement that may not enter the upper text in some primal and untamed condition precisely because it will upend the narrative integrity of the text proper.² A footnote of this type is the exception generated by the argument as a condition of its own possibility. As an exception it is included in the text. Yet it is excluded in the moment of inclusion in order for the narrative to safeguard its unity. The exception, in short, constitutes the norm in the figure of an excluded inclusion just as the footnote is a textual fragment banished from the text in which it is included.³ The exception demonstrates how the argument (as norm or law or rule) is constituted in relation to it, but it also evinces the potential of a becoming-event that vexes the rule without usurping it. My point is that historical exceptions have the habit of throwing open unusual vistas into what we think we know of history. They violate the rule, and this violation plays a part in constituting the rule in the first instance, without assuming its place. The rule is displaced, yes, but not replaced. Indeed, exceptions succeed in complicating prior assumptions and received norms by opening up an arena for small interventions. In their difference from canonical accounts in which they figure, minor histories act as supplements that haunt, and therefore put off, the self-presence of dominant histories. ‘Hegemony’, writes Derrida, ‘organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting. Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony’ (37). By deferring the self-presence of big dramas, exceptions decline to let the norm settle into anything resembling the normative. They do not so much attempt to summon up the peculiar in our experience of the commonplace, as disclose the dynamic of calibrated events on which momentous histories are founded. In the sliding scale of eventfulness, certain details, by dint of being small dramas or quasi-events or exceptions, lack the eventfulness proper to the narrative series, with the result that they fall below the radar even when recorded. Although noted, they are seldom noteworthy. To invoke the quasi-event as an exception is to listen to history murmuring in the minor key against its own striving for plenitude and finality. Minor history is ‘under-voiced’, or, which is the same thing, delivered sotto voce in the midst of the clamorous conversation. It is only possible to hear it by ‘bending closer to the ground’ (Guha 138). A newfound intimacy with the ground has the potential to restore to history what it includes but barely registers

² In his ‘Introduction’ to Sigmund Freud’s Civilization and Its Discontents, Leo Bersani remarks that ‘footnotes play the role of the psychoanalytic unconscious in this work’ but that ‘the material of the footnotes will be allowed into the text proper—into the quite proper text—only if its sexual components are expunged’ (xiv).
³ My argument on the exception is derived from Giorgio Agamben’s philosophical account of it (see Agamben, passim).
on its Richter scale of significant events. Toni Morrison once described pasts that fall through the cracks of history as disremembered pasts to be invoked through acts of ‘rememory’, by which she means the mind’s potential to have a memory of memory itself (Morrison 118, 215). Minor history involves such acts of rememory.

**Girmit as Exception**

The exception that murmurs to us first is the twice-stressed noun, girmit, for so long misheard by history. A common error of dominant scholarship has been to treat indenture and girmit as peas in a pod. Girmit is held to be ‘agreement’ in a vulgarly distorted form. Indenture, understood as a legal compact between consenting parties, is made synonymous with girmit, a neologism employed by plantation workers to refer to a time of non-agreement. Whether girmit was a deliberate coinage or an error of tongue, or what M.K. Gandhi once called ‘a corrupt form of the English agreement’ (136) bears little relation to its status as a sign embodying an intention that is sharply at odds with indenture. The latter cannot be decoupled from the complex and interwoven intentions of its far-flung administrators. These include governors, secretaries of states, colonial secretaries, medical and police officers, prison superintendents, stipendiary magistrates, emigration agents, protectors, ships’ captains, planters, managers, inspectors, overseers, and the like. The intentions of these officials are usually expressed in non-affective prose where sensory categories are excised as a stylistic rule of thumb. Classical historiography, as historians know only too well, apes this logic by employing the same ruse of objectivity and dispassion with minimal reference to suggestio falsi (or ‘misrepresentation committed’) or suppressio veri (or ‘representation omitted’). Objectivity, it has been said, is a ruse directed at the disempowered (Fanon 37). One set of official intentions are weighed up and ranked against another in a series to mount an argument concerning the event proper. Regardless of the force or sagacity of the insights, it is clear that the historian’s intentions are implicated in an official view of the event under discussion. Acts and intentions not upholding the series converging on the event proper are admitted as exceptions or quasi-events in the lower strata of the narrative. In the case of girmit, there is an added urgency to negate its condition of exception by making it swappable with agreement. The upshot is that a subaltern sign brimming with the intentions and affects of girmitiya is fatally compromised. Elsewhere I have argued that girmit breaks away from

---

4 Intention is not the material fallacy of presence, but rather its ghost generated in and by writing: it refers to the absent presence or present absence of authorial drives.

5 Perry Anderson reflects on the distinction between the two types of distortion in an essay on Andreas Hillgruber (see Anderson 180).
its root noun, agreement, in all three linguistics senses—semantic, acoustic and graphic—and returns to historiography those dimensions of social experience it renounces, namely affects, humours and passions.\(^6\) Girmit contradicts the drift towards a future positive that defined the collective intentions of workers who signed up (see Mishra, ‘Time and Girmit’). It is of course impossible to separate the dreams and dramas of the recruits from the fantasies and manipulations of various agents and officials in any account of such a drift. All we can say with certitude is that, instead of a time that lived up to the agreement in deed form, the recruits encountered a time to which they had not agreed. Girmit as a sign of non-agreement relates to indenture as the exception relates to the rule in the paradox of an excluded inclusion. What is lost in eliminating the distinction between girmit and agreement is the affective history of a non-agreement. It is precisely this distinction that restores girmit to its proper place as a quarrel inside and against indenture in its sanctioned form. Girmit is a foreign body within indenture history. It signifies the betrayal of a positive aspiration in the traumatic time of non-agreement. It speaks not in the disciplined monotone of history, but in the erratic and affective polyphony of the witness. This witness, the girmitya, is born, as the name implies, in girmit, and only understands one genre, the \textit{gawa} or testimony.

It is evident that historiography is not resistant to the genre of the testimony. However, it includes testimonies within its system of representation on the condition that they are purged of affects, humours and passions. It is this sleight-of-hand that results in girmit’s correlation with agreement. As a sign of a time of non-agreement, however, girmit exists as an exception inside the rule precisely because it is an affective noun that resists the disciplinary protocols of history. This affective aspect is best exemplified in its chameleon-like capacity to mutate into the verb form ‘to suffer’. Perhaps the most important attestant to girmit in the context of Fiji was a young man of seventeen who shipped on Jumna II in 1893. His name was Totaram Sanadhya. Sanadhya left behind two invaluable accounts of the coolie pratha (system), \textit{Fiji Men Mere Ikkis Varsh (My Twenty-One Years in the Fiji Islands)} and ‘Bhut Len Ki Katha’ (‘The Story of the Haunted Line’). The second text, although short, affords an exceedingly rich account of the time of non-agreement, and I should like to focus mostly on it. But let me first illustrate my point regarding the workers’ intentions by citing a fragment from \textit{Ikkis Varsh}:

\begin{quote}
The arkati explained things to the people there [in the halfway house]:
‘Look, brothers, the place where you will work you will never have to
\end{quote}

\(^6\) Michel de Certeau comments insightfully on the part played by ‘positivist scientificity’ of the nineteenth century in the expulsion of humours and passions (25-27).
suffer any sorrows. There will never be any kind of problems there. You will eat a lot of bananas and a stomach-full of sugar cane, and play flutes in relaxation’. (Sanadhya, My Twenty-One Years 34)

In this excerpt the arkati’s fantasy projects a Hindu idyll associated with the flute-playing Krishna. The fantasy is consolidated in a subsequent paragraph by the recruiter’s reference to the ‘heaven’ of Fiji (My Twenty-One Years 34). It is not difficult to imagine how this picture might have worked on the minds of illiterate peasants, many of whom were poor and internally displaced, to effect an enchantment. If it is universally true, as has been claimed, that a large proportion of recruits believed that they were duped into signing up, it is because the time of girmit was not the object of their intentions. The general trend of the recruits towards a future positive, in a nutshell, transcended the diverse causal reasons adduced by history for their departure. Once sentenced to systemic drudgery in the colony, however, the penny dropped. The imagined future time of agreement turned into the present and actual time of non-agreement. ‘Bhut Len Ki Katha’ forms a compelling testimony to an experiential time of shipwreck and disenchantment.

Sanadhya’s account, it is critical to note, is inseparable from the intentions of his ghost scribe and translators. One would not want to underestimate the role played by his mediators in this regard. Yet, just as girmit attests to the existence of life-worlds that no longer exist, so the translated text attests to the presence of an irreducible voice that evades the act of translation. It is this voice that I seek to comprehend in the account that follows. ‘Bhut Len Ki Katha’ begins with an explanation of how the author, under instruction from an overseer, becomes the sole resident of a coolie line capable of housing seventy two adult recruits. Rat-infested, mosquito-ridden and smothered in overgrown weeds, the line, it turns out, is haunted by the ghosts of dead indigenous workers and shunned by the living. The possessed line becomes a spatial metonym for a time of non-agreement. It is situated between two worlds and two times, that is to say, between the worlds of the living and the dead and between the times of agreement and counter-agreement. Signifying an intermediate zone of non-agreement in which the worker is cut off from tangible and meaningful forms of human intercourse, the line can only be peopled by the living dead. In keeping with this in-between logic, Sanadhya finds himself suspended between two terrors. There is the terror of the supernatural on one hand and the fear of violating the overseer’s injunction on the other. In the end he decides he has a better prospect of warding off the first evil. “‘We will see when the ghost comes”, he declares to a compatriot, “He is the ghost of the line and I am the Company’s ghost”’ (Sanadhya, ‘Haunted Line’ 108). If the ghost of the line is

7 John D. Kelly, for instance, comments that ‘the conviction that the recruitment was a “dirty trick”, a sham, that recruiters lied and deceived, seems to have been near universal among the Fiji labourers’ (see Kelly 28).
one type of revenant, that of a dead worker returning to the world of the living, then the ghost of the Company is another, that of the living worker entering the world of the dead. Both represent the living dead subject to the regulated, and therefore inhuman, time of girmit.

It could be argued that the entire testimony revolves around Sanadhya’s ordeal to be rid of his alienated and spectral condition, reinforced at every turn by scenes of hunger, violence and misery, to the point that he tries to end his own life. Ghostliness, and this appears to be the suggestion, is the potential state of beings whose life-worlds are degraded to a level devoid even of simple forms of social intercourse. Prior to arriving at this extreme stage, which may be described as the limit-point of the human, Sanadhya attempts to reclaim his agency as a cultural, religious and biopolitical subject. He cuts down the grass, cleans up the room and takes to intoning verses from the Gita. In a short while, he wins over an audience of listeners and becomes known as the ‘exorciser of the haunted line’ (‘Haunted Line’ 109). On a Sunday, reprieved from regulated drudgery, he goes for a stroll and comes across girmitiya singing ballads and songs of devotion, reciting the Ramayana, strumming the tanpura and wrestling on the ground, but even these communal forms of activity fail to offset the many scenes of deprivation, abuse, estrangement and dejection. He sees famished workers abasing themselves before a sirdar; a friend is manhandled by an overseer and his tulsi beads desecrated; and a woman washing rags by a stream, made distraught by her severance from loved ones, including a three-year old child, is filled with thoughts of death (109-10). ‘Oh Sister’, laments another, ‘how will we be able to endure five years of girmit’ (110). Indeed, witnessing the plight of girmitiya women, Sanadhya’s sense of outrage, which is bound up with patriarchal assumptions about honour and chastity, intensifies. Finally, it erupts in the form of the direct address to a legendary, anthropomorpised India:

‘Alas, Bharat, you are old and timid and unable to see though you have eyes. Your knowledge and wisdom no longer count for anything. You have become heartless. … You seem to have lost your manly strength: don’t you have any concern for your self-respect? … Is there any other place like you whose women are enslaved and sent overseas? No, no, no other would be prepared to endure such an indignity.’ (109)

The intriguing aspect to this polemic is that it is directed at Bharat and not at the India of the British Raj. The suggestion is that Indians, lacking in real agency, have become humiliated bystanders to their own history. Far from active producers of ethical knowledge and defenders of satitva, they silently collaborate in the shipment of women-as-commodities. In a tone alternating between chastisement and contempt, the exemplary witness turns his feelings of betrayal into a rousing call-to-arms.
The straw that breaks the camel’s back is precisely the issue of agency. Sanadhya discovers that he cannot exercise even the minimal agency reserved for social subjects. The analogy with ghosts becomes even more apt in this context, in that apparitions too lack agency. The story, in any case, unfolds as follows. Several workers pay the author a visit and he provides them with a meal, thus observing a standard rule of propriety while upholding a cultural practice that equates guests with gods. ‘Atithi devo bhavah’, as Taittiriya Upanishad has it. However, in exercising this modest right to hospitality, he ends up consuming a whole week’s allowance, contravenes the overseer’s ban on sharing rations, and is reduced within days to animalistic hunger. ‘What a country this is’, he exclaims, ‘where sharing food is an offence punishable by imprisonment’ (108). Racked by the hunger pangs of bare life (and a nervous empathy for rats ensues from this recognition of a shared existence), Sanadhya becomes increasingly exposed to a life-world devoid of simple forms of care and concern. Cut off from human sociality, and subject to the alienating demands of the body, he begins to hallucinate. He imagines he is back in his village and cared for by his mother. ‘“Come, let me feed you”’, she says. Then, lifting me up by one hand and brushing off dust from my hair with another, she takes me inside and gives me food. I drink from my old water bowl and buttermilk from the same old earthen pot. I am surrounded by my childhood friends. One of them asks: “Where have you been all this time”. I reply, “Fiji” (110). A spellbinding proper name at the outset of the journey, ‘Fiji’ here shatters the spell, the mirage vanishes, and the author is returned to the haunted line, alone and unfed. Sanadhya’s every attempt to find food ends in defeat. When he uses bitter irony in an attempt to alert the overseer to his condition, he is sent to the hospital for treatment. Worried, he seeks out a fellow Brahmin, but his host, in keeping with the remorseless logic of girmit, leaves him by the door and goes off to dine alone. Finally, he runs into some workers drinking cane juice inside the mill, and is offered a cup, but the chemist comes by, seizes the vessel and throws him out. In desperation he decides to end his life on the third night. His plans are interrupted by a knock on the door. The visitors turn out to be four hungry itaukei men, not ghosts as he imagines, returning to their village after a funeral service. One of them, Sam, happens to be a survivor of the sickness that killed the eight indigenous workers. His visitors ask for food, but Sanadhya has none to offer. To his wonder, the men find scraps of rice in a pot from his last meal, and partake of it. They then depart only to return after a couple of hours, accompanied by four others, bearing gifts of sweet potato, yam and vegetables. These they prepare and serve to the girmitiya on a plaintain leaf. It is of utmost significance that this gesture of care and concern comes from free men unrelated to the time of girmit. Unlike

---

8 ‘Bare life’ here denotes the enforced and artificial reduction to the state of zoé and not zoe as the condition of animal ‘givenness’ in nature. I would like to thank members of my Suva Reading Group, and in particular Maebh Long and Russell Smith, for provoking a vibrant discussion around this distinction.
coolie workers, and this is the key point, free men are able to exercise their cultural agency and simple right to hospitality. The living dead resident of bhut len, cut off from agency and sociality in the time of non-agreement, has his life affirmed by non-ghosts and gains insight into what it means to be human again. ‘Soon it was daylight’, he writes, ‘and the beginning of a new life for me’ (112). ‘Bhut Len Ki Katha’ affords a valuable lesson on the figure of the exception. Just as a ghost is an exception to the living social being and its history is the restive and spectral history of solitude, so girmit is an exception to indenture, and its history is the drama of living death played out in a time of non-agreement.

The Insane Exception

It is the figure of the exception that allows madness to enter history, and along with it the mad subject. The locus of reason, it has been argued, is also the locus of unreason (Foucault, *Madness* 77). Insanity is the exception that resides inside the body of sanity. The whole economy of sanity comes to light with the eruption of its constitutive other, the included excluded, dwelling like our proverbial footnote inside the argument from which it is barred. Sanity is not merely an abstract figure of reason; it is reason’s projection and manifestation in built spaces, ranked tables, laws of crime and punishment, social conventions, speech proprieties, sartorial customs, protocols of taste and decency, work schedules, logical modes of argumentation, and so on. It involves the perception of an underlying system that results from the habituation of norms. In identifying the exception within itself, reason admits to a constitutive kinship with madness. When the insane exception is invoked, say in the faux pas or slip of tongue, sanity causes itself to be maddened by voicing, and therefore subsuming, the very quantities it purports to exclude. What lies revealed is a structure of constitutive complicity.

On 29 October 1881, an Indian woman wanders into history by infringing the codes of colonial reason. Her deviant ways render her a figure of exception inside the norm, and therefore newsworthy.9 Her name is Sookdaie, father’s name Soochit, but we are not to know that yet. She is said to loiter around Suva without regard to its socio-spatial arrangement and in a condition of semi-nudity. She will not be confined to the Immigration Depot. Destitute, she is accompanied by a child and ‘daily squats … in the front verandah of the principal hotel hoping no doubt to excite pity and exact Baksheesh’ (*The Suva Times*, 29 October 1881). The woman deviates from the order of colonial reason.

9 Michel Foucault makes a similar point when he observes how minor items ‘make the transition from the familiar to the remarkable, the everyday to the historical’ by taking on the characteristics of the ‘“singular”, “curious”, “extraordinary”, unique, or very nearly so, in the memory of man’ (see Foucault, *I, Pierre Rivière...* 204).
with regard to space, dress and work. She usurps the central arenas of the new
township, offends against sartorial codes of decency, and, in not utilizing her
labour power, breaches the main reason for her presence in the colony. For
colonial reason, as exemplified in another case, the exercise of choice in the
matter of work is a clear symptom of madness. A week later, Sookdaie receives
a second notice in the newspaper:

This poor woman … takes up her position in the most public place possible
and gives vent to her lamentation in songs of the most heartrending
strains. Strains which not only affect herself to tears but which cannot
but affect others. Unfortunately, we cannot tell the burden of her ditty.
It is in Coolie or some kindred tongue. Nor can we tell whether she sings
to us for pity, or at us in derision. (The Suva Times, 5 November 1881)

Madness is at once affective, capable of possessing the sane and insane alike, and
mystifying as a figure of an exception. It moves in that uncanny arena of floating
ambivalence where self-pity and derision are conjoined to the point that one
cannot tell them apart. A resemblance is forged between two unlikely terms:
pity and derision. Ambivalence, being at one with madness, invades the very
seat of rationality. Colonial reason fails to decipher the mad song that affects
it because it cannot fully grasp the unreason within itself, the enigma of its
own insanity producing sanity. Just as indenture is productive of girmit, so the
sanity of regulated coolie traffic is productive of the insane vagabond. The call
goes out to establish an institution, an indigent hospital, to house this figure of
exception, this signifier of trauma, whose outrageous presence compels reason
to look itself in the mirror. Five months later, now referred to as ‘a disgrace to
our civilisation’ (The Suva Times, 11 March 1882), Sookdaie is still on the loose.
Once again, she is a deeply ambivalent figure, reproaching the authorities and
bringing shame to the residents. On this occasion, however, she takes over the
most powerful edifice of colonial authority:

Of late she has taken up quarters in the Supreme Court verandah and
rouses the echoes of her eloquence, now during the night, now at early
dawn, as she harangues all and sundry, while she parades the verandah
from end to end. (The Suva Times, 11 March 1882)

It is at the site of law that reason turns its abstract logic into material policy;
it determines what constitutes crime and therefore punishment, sanctity and
therefore blasphemy, sanity and therefore derangement, norm and therefore

10 One CSR Company Manager wrote to the Acting Agent General of Immigration in 1884 complaining
about a woman named Dhurma who ‘is not right in her mind, and only works when she chooses’ (CSO MP
241/1886).

11 Michel Foucault comments that the madman ‘groups all signs together and leads them with a resemblance
that never ceases to proliferate’ (Order of Things 49).
abnormality. The mad woman making pronouncements from the verandah of the Supreme Court illustrates the following axiom. Seizing the place of law, the outlaw attests to the lawlessness of a law that engenders it as such; similarly, seizing the place of reason, unreason points to the madness of the reason that gives rise to it. By occupying the place of law, Sookdaie testifies soulfully to the madness at the heart of colonial reason.

Sookdaie’s transgressions are noted in *The Suva Times* on a fourth occasion on 27 May 1882, and on 27 September 1883, Governor Des Voeux alerts the Government of India to the presence of coolie lunatics in Fiji. Predictably there is some disagreement on whether the recruits were of unsound mind prior to their departure or after arrival in the colony. By 1884 the anonymous madwoman, most likely responsible for the establishment of the Public Lunatic Asylum in Suva, is listed on an inventory of insane immigrants, and enters history as a proper name and a pass number—79. In the remarks column of the list, it is commented that the woman ‘wanders about the town seemingly without restraint’, but the comment is crossed out because she is now an inmate of the asylum. The footnote that erupts inside the colonial order, and threatens to send it insane, is incarcerated and returned to its proper place below the bar. The only other contender for the role, Oziari (or Ozeeari as she appears in her Woman’s Pass), is confirmed to have died on 2 June 1880, the year before Sookdaie becomes a public nuisance. There is another telling item. The lunatic is said to wander about Suva with her child and Sookdaie’s Emigration Pass registers that she is the mother of Pass 87 or five-year old Ramsomjh. Mother and child are by caste Bania and hail from the village of Dholpur in the zillah of Sultanpur. It is of course rare to find members of the trading caste among the indentured emigrants, and one is left to wonder what might have led the twenty-four year old to undertake the voyage. Widows, we know, were often driven out by their families in nineteenth century North India and there is a possibility that Sookdaie and Ramsomjh were victims of this practice. Guha, for instance, observes that ‘the largest group of female outcastes was made up … by Hindu widows ostracized for defying the controls exercised on their sexuality by the local patriarchs’ (Guha 158). If so, then colonial and patriarchal reason, as

---

12 CSO MP 241/1886.
13 Both the Surgeon Superintendent and the Depot Surgeon had to certify that the recruit was ‘free from all bodily and mental disease’. Obviously there is a lacuna between certification and fact, but it is improbable that recruits of unsound mind travelled on the Leonidas. As a result of the widespread hostility in Fiji towards the idea of coolie migrants, Robert Mitchell had taken pains to handpick the recruits at the behest of Sir Arthur Gordon.
14 CSO MP 1432/1885.
15 E/Pass 406 (Leonidas).
16 CSO MP 1432/1885.
17 E/Pass 87 (Leonidas).
18 In his milestone study, *Girmitiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians*, Brij Lal does not list banias in the nine caste groups of female migrants to Fiji (see Lal 140).
manifested in caste-based practices, unite in producing this figure of an insane exception. To be sure, the harder colonial reason attempts to pin down the madness it begets the more illogical becomes its logic. In one list, for instance, recruits diagnosed with dementia, chronic dementia, mania, idiocy and insanity are included alongside a Brahmin fakir, a Panjabi scribe, his wife, and a Muslim munshi.  

We know from other sources that the fakir, Narpati, the scribe, Natha Sing and his wife, Muthuria, although unfit for work, were of sound mind. Taxonomy, as Michel Foucault has argued, operates by positing identities and differences within the ambit of the table. In terms of our example, the system would function through identifying similarities between different forms of madness and vice versa. The presence, therefore, of the sane in a table listing the insane testifies to the madness inherent within colonial reason. To be precise, it pertains to the lunacy of a utilitarian correlation between work, physical health and sanity. It is not for nothing that Natha Singh and Narpati are described as ‘useless’ in one revealing dispatch. By 1884, unhinged by the madness it begets, colonial reason decides to return the mad to the geographical point of pre-diagnosis. In the month of May, 1886, eight ‘decrepit and insane’ recruits considered ‘incurable and fit to undergo the voyage’, are shipped to India on the Boyne. Sookdaie is not among them. One could attempt several inferences here, but that would hardly be the point. The point is that she is worthy of history only when she sends colonial reason into a state of panic with her transgressions. The moment she is interned in an institution to which she gives birth, Sookdaie forfeits her exceptional status and no longer merits notice. Even before she dies, she is dead to history.

Coda

A month after the Boyne hauls anchor with its depressing cargo, the Colonial Secretary receives a letter from the Visiting Justice recommending the application of twenty lashes to ‘an incorrigible idler’ by the name of Deen Mahomet. Attached to the letter is a tabulated list of offences with the corresponding punishment in a dialectical system of cause and effect. In the list of offences, which includes malingering, refusal to work and disorderly conduct, is ‘breaking wind in Native gaol at 8pm’. For this offence, the prisoner is put on three days of reduced diet. Punishment, we know, is ‘a technique for the coercion of individuals’ insofar as the body is trained into accepting a form of docility in the acquisition of

19 CSO MP 1432/1885.
20 CSO MP 241/1886.
22 CSO MP 241/1886.
23 CSO MP 997/1886.
24 CSO MP 1325/1886.
new habits and attitudes (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 131). But what is the precise offensive value of this offence? Is it the body’s involuntary rebellion against the cellular solitude and regimented monotony of the penal system? Mahomet’s wind violates some penal code, and subversively so, and is read as an intentional act that can be brought under control. Not content to discipline physical gestures and mental habits, penal discipline seeks admission into the prisoner’s digestive economy, to take hold of those flatulent spaces over which he has little or no hold. Is Deen Mahomet’s offensive volition present in an involuntary act of the body? Or does the act tell us something about the coercive intentions of a paranoid reason that must find offence everywhere and mete out punishment through targeted redress? The fart is everything outside will, law, obedience, reason and system; it emanates from the body but the body exercises no control over it; it has the subversive force of sudden laughter, and is equal to it; and it relates to both penal and biological regimes as the exception relates to the rule. Grumbling in the lower depths of Deen Mohamet’s anatomy is nothing less than minor history.

*Sudesh Mishra was educated in Fiji and Australia. He is the author of Diaspora Criticism (2006) and is putting together a series of papers on minor history. He is a Professor in the School of Language, Arts and Media, University of the South Pacific.*

**Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to the staff of the National Archives of Fiji for their kind and prompt assistance.

**Works Cited**


‘Strange Disclosures’: The Story of the Criminal Forger and Absconder, Elias Rosenwax and his Capture in Levuka by ‘Evarama, the Native Fijian Policeman’, 1871

Nicole Anae

It was as much the story of the criminal Elias Rosenwax as it was the tale of heroism featuring the Fijian policeman, ‘Evarama’, in 1871. The real-life event included all the literary elements necessary for a narrative of high adventure: a criminal, a chase, an exotic location, subterfuge, and the criminal’s eventual capture with the assistance of an unlikely hero in a thrilling climax. While the textual trace of this event remains all but forgotten, the extant nineteenth-century ephemera detailing the encounter endures as a cogent genre of literature. This paper explores the incident with a view to detailing Evarama’s major significance in the performance of Fijian identity during a period dominated by grand colonial narratives featuring highly stylized ethnographic displays of the ‘native’ Other. His cultural impact as a Fijian, his reification in popular culture as a celebrity, and his active engagement in the construction of his public persona counterpointed the static fashioning of Fijian identity so common in the era’s ethnographic exhibitions, public performances, photographic displays and anthropological presentations. Evarama’s popular presence in colonial culture makes it possible to identify the operation of a particular kind of fashioning of culture: individual expressions of racial identity as social performance—a practice of the public self.

Before examining Evarama’s interaction with aspects of Fijian material culture to construct not one, but a variety of identities—Fijian, ‘native’, constable, swimmer, diver, among others, we will begin with what Robert M. Kaplan has termed the ‘somewhat wistful, tale into crime ... of Polish-born pawnbroker, jeweler and merchant’ Elias Rosenwax (89). Alternately described in contemporary reports as ‘the Melbourne defaulter’, ‘the defaulting pawnbroker’, and ‘the levanting pawnbroker’, among many other sobriquets, the name Elias Rosenwax became for a time synonymous with capture, detention, and punishment.¹ One of the

¹ Wanganui Herald, Volume IV, Issue 1278, 20 November 1871, p. 2; Otago Daily Times, Issue 3046, 10 November 1871, p. 2; Star, Issue 1183, 2 December 1871, p. 3.
more humorous contemporary descriptions of his activities as a lawbreaker emerges in the 4 December 1871 issue of the *Illustrated Australian News* in an account beginning thus:

There are many ways of achieving celebrity, and like greatness sometimes it is thrust upon an unwilling recipient. Elias Rosenwax, a well-known citizen of Melbourne, in an evil hour bethought him of testing the climate of the Fijis, and previous to his departure to that land of promise he laded himself with the spoil of the Egyptians. On the 23rd September ... he left, without taking leave of his friends, having secured a passage in the Eliza Firth. On the 18th October the good folks of Levuka [Fiji] were startled by the fact that the steamship Balelutha had arrived, having on board Mr. Otto Berliner. (216)

Otto Berliner was, according to contemporaneous reports, a ‘detective constable’, ‘the well-known detective’ and member of Melbourne’s ‘private inquiry office’. Berliner was director of the Australian Headquarters of the General Mercantile Agency and Private Inquiry bureau in Melbourne, ‘the first office of the kind established in the colonies of Australia’. Its function was, among other things, to find people who did not necessarily want to be found. Rosenwax was one such candidate. Local reports claimed Rosenwax’s creditors had subscribed an amount of £1000, thus underwriting the cost of chartering a steamer, *Balclutha*, to Fiji with Berliner on board. ‘[A]ided by a warrant and some stout assistants’ Berliner embarked on a journey, the purposes of which the *Otago Daily Witness* on 18 October 1871 described as ‘collaring Mr Rosenwax, gagging and handcuffing him, and bringing him and his booty back within the jurisdiction of our courts’ (5).

Upon arriving in Fiji, Berliner, according to the 4 December 1871 issue of the *Illustrated Australian News*, ‘at once went to Government House, and a cabinet meeting took place to hear all the particulars of the case ... the Government agreed to act with him, and a warrant was issued by special authority to the king in accordance with the constitution’ (216). He then commandeered an open boat, and together with a complement of three Fijian members of the Levuka constabulary, eventually recaptured Rosenwax after an unsuccessful first attempt. During the initial endeavor Rosenwax was ‘forcibly rescued from

---

4 Prior to the Rosenwax case, Berliner acted as the Australian representative of Sir Roger C. D. Tichborne on the Tichborne claimant case (1868). During the course of his career after the Rosenwax case, Berliner was involved with the Margaret Graham murder case (1873), as well as the attempted double murder and suicide at Melbourne’s Opera House in 1880, among many other well-known criminal cases. See *Colonist*, Volume XI, Issue 1868, 14 April 1868, p. 4; *Bruce Herald*, Volume VI, Issue 473, 21 March 1873, p. 3; *Evening Post*, Volume XX, Issue 172, 26 July 1880, p. 2.
custody by a party’ of cohorts, headed by Aaron Pinkins, and during the ensuing struggle one of the special constables was shot ‘with a pistol loaded with powder and ball’ (216).

Constable Evarama was the man responsible for escorting Elias Rosenwax back to Melbourne under warrant upon his re-capture. Under the custody of Evarama, Rosenwax ‘was landed at Sandridge from the City of Melbourne steamer on Monday 6 November, at about six o’clock’ (216). The massive crowd that gathered at the docks to witness Rosenwax’s detention was evidence, not only of the high degree of justice-seeking among those merchants he had defrauded—characterised in one report as his ‘creditors and other dupes’—but also of the public interest in the case as a real-life criminal scandal.5 It was here that Evarama first attracted considerable attention among colonial onlookers. A reporter for the Argus described Evarama thus: ‘[he] was picturesquely dressed in a turban and waistband, supplemented by a Rob Roy plaid shawl twisted round his body. He is a man of medium height, but of strong build, and looks as if he could display a considerable amount of activity’.6 The ‘native Fijian policeman’ also attracted particular interest as a witness in the ensuing court trial. The Sydney Illustrated News claimed that Evarama appeared ‘a fine, muscular, well built, intelligent man, sufficiently able to make himself understood by Australians, and is a very good sample of the native inhabitants of the Fiji islands’.7

Media reports, such as the Queenslander 30 May 1874, claimed the Rosenwax case to be ‘one of those dirty businesses about which nobody but Jews have any interest’, but then went on to claim with a patent degree of interest that ‘the “Rosenwax case” is talked about at each street corner with a variety of accents which compels one to listen’ (10). With the degree of his crimes being discovered, the South Australian claimed Rosenwax reportedly ‘bolted to the Fiji Islands with £7,000 worth of goods’ (13 October 1871, p. 5). The Evening Post reported the absconder’s estate was sequestered with a rule of nisi and while he was charged on two counts—larceny and obtaining goods by means of false pretences (22 November 1871, p. 2)—court reports at the time of his release from gaol reveal he was ultimately found guilty of ‘fraudulent insolvency’.8 Rosenwax served three and a half years in prison.9 He was released from Melbourne Gaol in 1874.

5 North Otago Times, 17 October 1871, p. 2.
6 Melbourne Argus, 7 November 1871, p. 6.
7 Sydney Illustrated News, 20 February 1871.
8 Melbourne Argus, 25 April 1874, p. 4.
9 Infanticide, abortion, rape, murder, torture, armed robbery, theft, assault, conspiracy to commit a crime, negligence causing bodily harm, public drunkenness, larceny, forgery, housebreaking, shooting with intent to kill, embezzlement, unlawful and/or malicious wounding, slavery/carrying persons for the purposes of being dealt with as slaves, treason (see Treason-Felony Act) and obtaining property by false pretences, were among the number of crimes considered felonious offences during the period. For more information, see
The quest for Elias Rosenwax’s extradition in effect constituted the establishment of a set of relationships between, to borrow from Nicholas Thomas (1989), ‘objects and ethnographic facts’ (47). Here, the object Rosenwax came to embody the reach of colonial law, and indeed, the greater expression of inter-colonial exchange agreements. His extradition was ‘of interest’ to colonials, including but not limited to Rosenwax’s creditors, precisely because the objects involved the playing out of a crime occurring in ‘real-time’, and the site of Fiji as an ethnographic fact added to the exotic appeal of the narrative as all the more compelling. Within this dynamic discourse, the capture of Rosenwax came to embody the reach of colonial law, and indeed, the greater expression of inter-colonial exchange agreements. The case involved pushing the limits of legal processes of colonial law and order beyond the colonies, given that the extradition agreement brokered in relation to Rosenwax involved exchanges between men and structures of power: colonial and indigenous; white bureaucracy and Fijian lore; colonial jurisdiction and native law enforcers. Yes, the chase for Rosenwax was on, but with the involvement of the ‘Fijian Native Policemen Evarama’, ethnographic facts suddenly took on even greater interest as key symbols of inter-Pacific mechanisms of crime and punishment. Evarama’s presence was in fact doubly significant. Not only was he the Fijian face of the expression of inter-colonial law enforcement, but his presence as envoy signaled in this instance a shift in power relations between Fiji and Australia that was preferential to the Fijians: ‘For colonial forces it was, of course’, claims Thomas, ‘almost always possible to act without regard to indigenous relations; to refuse to recognise and displace indigenous sovereignty; or to … acknowledge their [local leaders] roles while undermining them’ (49). In fact, the Otago Daily Witness stated on 18 October 1871 that cases of this kind had found little in the form of satisfactory resolutions within the precepts of contemporary colonial law:

In regard to cases of this kind, where there is no law to meet the circumstances, it is very reasonably held that as law can lend no aid, neither can it interfere to prevent persons from helping themselves. (5)

The popularised narrative of this capture and extradition made for a fact-not-fiction adventure that paled in comparison to the fictionalised accounts of felony and retribution so often found in serialised form in newspapers of the day. An illustration printed in the Illustrated Australian News on 4 December 1871 details in high relief the real-life drama of the capture of Rosenwax (see <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/printArticleJpg/60448593/3?print=n>).

Police Criminal Statistics reports published by Adelaide’s South Australian Register, 22 April 1874, p. 1, and other newspapers. For more on the Treason-Felony Act, see Melbourne Argus, 1 April 1868, p. 6 among many others.
The Argus reported on 29 March 1869 that the Australian Extradition Act only authorised the extradition of criminal offenders from one Australian colony to another, with a secondary caveat that the extradition of offenders only applied to offences committed within the colonies (1S). It could be argued that the Rosenwax case, at least in part, set a legal precedent. Yes, his capture in Fiji was essentially kidnap disguised as extradition, yet his repatriation was also a test case given credibility because the scope of his crimes lay within colonial boundaries. Provided that private creditors had the financial means to conceive and deploy an individualised mechanism for compensation, there remained a legal way to marshal justice, but in this instance, only with the provision that a respect of indigenous sovereignty be accorded. In the attempted extradition of Rosenwax, indigenous power could not be displaced, ignored, or otherwise undermined. Perhaps this was the case given the extradition order was the result of a private lobby, and funding, of a syndicate comprising his principal lenders. The plot hatched by Rosenwax’s ‘creditors and other dupes’ thus represented the modus operandi ‘helping themselves’ in action.

If successful, the proposal had the potential not only to change the dynamics of colonial versus indigenous power, but revolutionise the significance of Fiji among reprobates as a destination of sanctuary. The success of the scheme in achieving such a mission is perhaps best illustrated by the report in the Illustrated Australian News, claiming that by virtue of the ‘energetic action on the part of the Fijian Government, Levuka will henceforth be tabooed as a city of refuge for that particular class of criminal in Australia which delights in spending the fruits of its villainy at a distance from the scene of operations, and where prying eyes of the victims cannot penetrate’ (216). Indeed, evidence exists that the Rosenwax case did influence mechanisms of crime, punishment, and colonial law and order in Fiji. In April 1872, reports claimed ‘the readiness with which the Government [of Fiji] gave assistance to capture Rosenwax, in the face of the opposition of several influential residents of Fiji, was an evidence of their willingness to support law and order so far as they are able’. 10

The claim was made in direct reference to another case involving two British ‘aliens’. Daniel Sinclair had run down a canoe of Fijians his in cutter Cambria, captured and manacled two of the men in chains—Isoa and Massee from the Malacola community—and violently assaulted the captives abetted by his wife. 11 While the court found Sinclair guilty of unlawful assault, sentencing him to three months in prison and a £300 fine, his wife escaped any charge. The incident typified what the Williamston Chronicle characterised as trend ‘among

10 Williamstown Chronicle, 13 April 1872, p. 5.
11 The two Fijians, Isoa and Massee, later escaped their manacles after enduring violent assaults and killed the two men responsible for guarding them, named Pulford and Thorpe. For more details about the case, see Queenslander, 6 April 1872, p. 10 among others.
law-breaking Britons … hovering about the islands … to plead British birth as a reason for non-interference on the part of the Government of the country’. The case motivated the sitting court judge at Levuka to declare ‘Persons coming to Fiji must obey and be bound by the local laws, and … not allowed to escape merely because they denied [the] courts authority’. The editorial concluded that ‘whatever may be the shortcomings, past and present, of Thakombau’s Ministers, it is to their credit that they instructed the Crown prosecutor to initiate proceedings against this ‘alien’.

Such claims responded to an entrenched cultural viewpoint that Fiji was ‘a sort of Australian Patmos—a place of refuge for all persons to whom Victoria was not a safe residence, owing to their peculiar notions about the laws of property’. Of the then capital Levuka, reports claimed that ‘“Sloped for Callao”, and “Gone to Fiji”, are synonymous terms with many people in Victoria and New South Wales, who have come to regard Levuka as the rendezvous for the scum of the Australian colonies’. The debate about Fiji’s broader reputation as a location of asylum post-cession was even entered into by the celebrated novelist Anthony Trollope, who declared in a treatise published in the *Bruce Herald* on 14 January 1876: ‘If England would not take it Fiji must become a mere nest of robbers and a curse to that side of the world—especially a curse to our Australasian colonies, which are comparatively near to it’.

Some accounts, however, appeared ambivalent concerning the implications of the Rosenwax extradition case. The *Otago Daily Times*, while determining it ‘satisfactory to find that Fiji is no longer to be the safe Alsatia of the Colonies’, expressed ‘grave doubts’ concerning ‘the legality of this capture … [given] the summary “jumping” of absconding creditors, without a warrant or form of law, is a process capable of abuse, and which nothing but exceptional circumstances of the strongest nature could excuse’ (11 December 1871, p. 2). Yet, from the point of view of cultural interest, these concerns essentially contributed to the drama and crisis of an already intriguing story. In fact, Berliner himself capitalised on the account’s enduring interest. The chapter detailing the narrative of the Rosenwax case in the agency handbook published during his directorship of the Australian Headquarters of the General Mercantile Agency and Private Inquiry office was a highlight of the publication. The *Wanganui Chronicle* of 26 July 1877 stated that ‘The capture of the defrauding pawnbroker, Rosenwax, [12] *Williamstown Chronicle*, 13 April 1872, p. 5.
[15] Also see Anthony Trollope (1941). The Fiji islands were ceded to Britain on 10 October 1874 by, according to Thomas Nichols (1989), ‘a group of leading chiefs’ (46). Trevor Sofield (2000) claims that ‘After some 30 years of slaughter, the Great Council of Chiefs was formed and Fiji ceded to Britain to bring in “pax Britannica”’. Most Fijians think the Great Council of Chiefs has existed “since time immemorial”—but it first met only 124 years ago, in 1876. The Council was dominated by Polynesian high chiefs with the some Melanesians with lesser “royal” status than the kingly lines from Ma’afu and Tonga.’
in the Fijis, forms an interesting chapter full of incident and adventure, and proves how a skilful, determined officer can attain his legitimate ends, even when opposed by hostile influences and beset by obstacles of all kinds’ (2).

While some described him as ‘a Hebrew pawnbroker’, and of his deeds it was said ‘he did something exceptionally disgraceful in business’, the fact that Rosenwax ‘levanted [to Fiji] only to be brought back by a subscription of the tribes [in the custody of Evarama]’ was an aspect of the tale attracting the keenest interest. How it was that Evarama came to be the Fiji representative given the task of escorting Rosenwax back to Australia can only be guessed at. What is clear, however, is Evarama’s patent significance in influencing contemporary attitudes to demonstrations of Fijian identity during the era, particularly as a counterpoint to those conceived in popular public displays featuring the ethnographic other. Yet his significance can be taken one step further. Evarama’s public fashioning and engagement with contemporary colonial culture also confronted the question of agency in the public expression of the ‘native’ other identity.

While he was also known in contemporary reports as ‘Erarama’ and ‘Everama’ (among others) I have discovered only one single newspaper notice (Argus, 23 February 1872, p. 3) making reference to a full name (see <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/printArticleJpg/5860010/6?print=n>). The notice gives his surname as ‘Valelova’ which may or may not be correct.

His popular credibility in press accounts as a ‘good sample of the native inhabitants of the Fiji islands’ comes at a significant time in the public image of Fiji both culturally and politically. Under Seru Epenisa Cakobau (King Thakombau [1815 – 1883]), Fiji had only recently instituted a provisional government (mid July 1871), and persistent insurrections plagued indigenous and colonial settlements alike. Arguably, the only other Fijian as proactively involved in

---

16 In fact, it is possible to argue that Berliner’s profession was also given extra credibility considering that, in a report published by the Wangasui Herald on 20 November 1871, the Fijian Government had agreed to his ‘being sworn in a member of the Fijian police in order that he might the more effectually prosecute the business of the arrest’ (2). In fact the added reward for Berliner was, according to the Grey River Argus, that the Fijian Government ‘will make him a magistrate in appreciation of his services’ (20 November 1871, p. 2).
17 Brisbane Queenslander, 30 May 1874, p. 10.
18 Sydney Illustrated News, 20 February 1871. ‘Evarama’ was also known in contemporary reports as ‘Erarama’, ‘Everama’, ‘Erromana’, and Erromona.’ Discussions with Paul Geraghty, Associate Professor of Linguistics, University of the South Pacific, suggest that ‘Evarama’ was likely an Anglicised misspelling of a Fijian word. Anecdotal reports after giving an abbreviated reading of this paper at the First Fiji Literary Festival (Fiji National University, Nadi, 2-8 October 2011), suggest that ‘Evarama’ may also have been a Fijian version of ‘Abraham’.
19 The name given as ‘Valelova’ may be accurate. Paul Geraghty suggests another possibility is that it is a misspelling of a more common Fijian surname, such as ‘Volavola’.
the public construction of his identity during this period was Cakobau, ‘King Thakombau’, of Fiji. The numerous illustrations of Seru Epenisa Cakobau of Fiji during this period attest to his visibility in contemporary colonial culture.20

In the aftermath of one insurgence, the North Otago Times of 11 August 1871 claimed the dismembered hand, reputedly of the Lovoni chief killed in the fighting between Thakombau’s militia and Lovoni rebels, was presented to ethnological collector, W. C. Gardenhire, ‘as an addition to his extensive collection of Fijian Curiosities’ (2).

Everywhere in venues for public entertainments during the 1870s—theatres, assembly rooms, Mechanics’ Institutions, halls, photographic studios and saloon bars—there were attractions such as Gardenhire’s capitalising on the widespread interest in Fijian material culture and identity among white colonials. Yet rather than static displays, Gardenhire took the ethnographic character of his arrangements one step further: he included living Fijians. He assembled and took his so-called ‘Fijian Curiosities’ to the United States, no doubt to exploit the ethnographical market in exotic ‘others’ created by the American showman, Phineas Taylor Barnum. Gardenhire reportedly sequestered for the spectacle, according to the Auckland Star, ‘three Fijian servants’, ‘two chiefs’, and ‘one dwarf 3ft. 4 in. high’ (29 June 1871, p. 2). The latter Fijian earned the moniker; ‘the General’.21 ‘The General’ reportedly entertained audiences ‘by playing on a flute through his nose’.22

James W. Shettel reported that ‘Four Wild Fiji Cannibals’ were captives of War ransomed from King Thakombau by Barnum at a cost of $15,000 (44). A report appearing in Australia via the Pall Mall Gazette proclaimed that Barnum obtained the Fijians by depositing the money with the American consul ‘as security for their return in August 1874, to the king of a hostile tribe who had captured them. On their return they [were] to be killed and eaten’. There exists an Original carte-de-visite photograph of the ‘Fiji Cannibals Imported by PT Barnum for his Great Show (Mathew Brady studio, New York, c. 1872)’.23 Robert Bogdan claims that it was later discovered that the ‘Fijian’ woman appearing in the photograph was ‘actually a native of Virginia and, prior to joining the show, had been the domestic servant of a gentleman who resided in Baltimore’ (183).

21 See Evening Post, Volume VIII, Issue 292, 13 January 1873, p. 2. The ‘General’ died at the Pennsylvania Hotel, apparently, according to the York Daily (Penn.) sometime around 15 May 1872. The only apparently accurate detail in the highly sensationalised account was that the Fijian had died. Also see Evening Post, Volume VIII, Issue 292, 13 January 1873, p. 2.
22 Pall Mall Gazette via Launceston Examiner, 28 May 1872, p. 3.
Dana Seitler examines the high popularity of photographic illustrations during the late nineteenth century (fin de siècle) and claims such texts ‘illustrate what Henry James has called an “American scene”—a world preoccupied with observation, supervision, and the intrigues of a new technology’ (71). Yet in the Australian colonial scene, the rite of being photographed had become less of a rite and more of a privilege reserved for those subjects offering viewers voyeuristic pleasures of the Other within the greater scheme of grand colonial narratives.

Photographic displays publicised as ‘Panoramas of Fiji’ often included a lecture, given by an expatriate resident white settler, or, more commonly, a member of the clergy. Presentations by ‘Fijian Chiefs’ appearing in traditional costume typically incorporated traditional dances complementing philanthropic lectures; ‘the scenes are enlarged photographs, and are therefore faithful representations of beautiful spots in this “isle of the sea”, while the effects are well worked’.24 During the above performance a ‘number of Fijians, among them a cannibal chief named Narcoe, appeared in native dress, or rather undress, and performed a number of Fijian dances, remarkable chiefly’, according to the Sydney Morning Herald, for ‘curious pantomimes and posturing’ (4 September 1879, p. 5).

Narcoe belonged to a Fijian troupe mobilised as a representative ensemble for performances in the Colonial Exhibition of 1879. In their presentation in the Garden Palace grounds, Sydney, individuals of the ensemble ‘circulated handbills, in which’, observed the Melbourne Argus ‘the public are informed, in the first place, that one of the chiefs is the “great Narcoe, who has eaten many human beings”’ (29 December 1879, p. 7). The reporter appeared to divine the spectacle for what it was, ‘got up by an astute agent simply as an advertisement’. Robert William Dixon and Veronica Kelly offer an interesting reading of the presentation as largely ambiguous; on the one hand an attempt to showcase the success of missionary efforts in taming ‘the noble savage’; and on the other, an implicitly manipulative act, in which the ‘presentation skilfully exploited, through dress and behaviour, their audiences’ pleasure in vicarious fear of the other’ (244).

Images of Evarama25 become a significant element of the texts narrating his presence in Colonial culture. And as texts telling stories, Evarama’s arrangement in static displays contrasted in many ways with his dynamic movements and accomplishments in real-life. What is interesting about these images of Evarama is his positioning with a firearm. While the weapon appears to be a long-rifle, or Musket Rifle, the fact that it includes a bayonet-point suggests it of the type

24 Sydney Morning Herald, 6 September 1879, p. 2.
25 See, for instance, Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers, 4 December 1871, p. 216. Images accompanying this article can be viewed in the web version at <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-May-2012/anae.html>.
favoured by mariners serving on early war-ships, such as HMS Barracouta—a long Enfield rifle—which were, according to the *Queenslander* of 30 January 1875, firearms that ‘converted into breech-loaders on the Snyder [sic] principle’ (8). These firearms were made of wood, hand-forged metal and brass. John Macdonald notes the weapon’s single-shot action had a rate of fire of 10 rounds per minute, and its effective range was over half a kilometre (232). The rifle was longer than most rifles of the era and with a fitted bayonet, the weapon extended to almost 173cm and its weight increased to almost 5 kg.

Yet while it is possible to mount these rifles ‘for the ordinary bayonet’, the fact that the one held by Evarama is thus fitted suggests a deliberately posed portrait in which the semiotic appeal of the bayoneted weapon no doubt contributed to its intended semiotic currency as perhaps threatening, but more likely informative. Accounts such as that of the *Queenslander* publicised that Fijians were well armed, commonly with Snider-Enfields and other rifles, and that they were ‘naturally first-class marksmen, and most careful of their rifle, and preserving in mastering its use [sic]’ (8).

Any threat of menace is clearly undone however in a reading of Evarama’s body language from above the shoulders. His chin is lowered and the corners of his mouth turned downward, matching the creases lining his forehead suggesting anxiety and perhaps even embarrassment. His eyes, gazing toward some distant point to his left suggest an emotional attitude akin to a plea, his shoulders are hunched yet his hands appear to be gripping the bayonet blade with considerable force. These cues are patently at odds with the stance of his lower-body, his left foot placed forward and the impressive proportions of his calves. Yet given the strangeness of the context, with its mechanised implements and stylised constraints, Evarama’s discomfort is justifiable, if not unsurprising. Moreover, the fact that he merited such an illustration offers a clear marker of his prominence, and together with this visibility, what makes Evarama, ‘the Native Fijian Policeman’, especially interesting is the trajectory of his story subsequent to his rise to fame as the man responsible for the extradition to Australia of the absconder Rosenwax.

Some reports in Australia and New Zealand took as given the fact that their readership understood who ‘Evarama’ was, but even if they did not, accounts situating him within the broader narrative of the Rosenwax case assured his public recognition. The *Otago Witness* was only one of a number of newspapers running the line: ‘A Fijian constable, who escorted Rosenwax to Melbourne, has been distinguishing himself by swimming and diving feats’. Evarama first achieved significant celebrity by confounding Victorians of the 1870s

26 Also see Launceston *Examiner*, 12 April 1882.
27 *Otago Witness*, Issue 1050, 13 January 1872, p. 5.
with what the *Illustrated Sydney News* of 20 February 1871 claimed were his ‘astonishing’ swimming feats. Newspapers of the day promoted his appearances in tournaments under headings claiming ‘Fiji versus Victoria’. A far more accurate claim, however, would have been ‘Fijian [singular] versus Victorians [plural]’, because a close examination of the list of competitors reveals that Evarama was the only Fijian, and that he alone would singlehandedly race against up to four white-Anglo Australian competitors for ‘the championship of the colony’ title. Perhaps it was the patent imbalance in the ratio of competitors that attracted hundreds of onlookers to such events.

Evarama also garnered much success as an expert diver. Melbourne *Age* reported that ‘the Fiji constable, Evarama, who came to Melbourne in charge of Rosenwax, was on Thursday evening a competitor in a swimming match at Hegarty’s Baths, St. Kilda, against Mr Stabach. They had a swim of 60 yards up and down, the Fijian winning easily. Time, 1 min. 15 sec. Evarama then dived 10 fathoms 35 yards in two minutes, and was loudly cheered’. Another venue staging a number of Evarama’s feats was the old ship’s hull of a 200 tonne Swedish whaling brig, the *Nancy*, converted by Captain William Kenney. Both venues were as much bathing centres as they were grand theatres for aquatic spectacles.

The complexity of such presentations as performances of identity evolved from the very early demonstrations of ‘Fiji’ and ‘Fijian’ displays organised as public spectacles by agents and theatre managers. This is what makes Evarama’s public expression particularly unique. Arguably, there was no other lay-individual invested in actively creating his own fashioning as Fijian during the period. On 20 February 1871, for instance, the *Sydney Illustrated News* reported that Evarama’s ‘presence created some excitement in Melbourne when he was seen promenading Collins-street in his national garb’. The report is telling not only for the imagery his constitutional must have inspired, but also given the more subtle reading that Evarama appeared free to represent himself, both as a private individual, and as an object of public curiosity, and even a source of entertainment. Evarama draws distinctions from his Fijian contemporaries because he did not appear bound to the instructions of an agent. Significantly, then, unlike the static miscellany of ensembles attributed to ethnologists such as W. C. Gardenhire, or the ostensibly *faux* amalgamations of Fijian identity conceived by the entrepreneur P. T. Barnum, among many other agents and managers, Evarama’s public opportunities were not limited to those sourced on his behalf by a third party. Nor was his behaviour limited to the constraints of representation and containment.

---

28 *Melbourne Age*, via *Southland Times*, Issue 1525, 16 January 1872, p. 3.
30 For an image, See *Australasian Sketcher with Pen and Pencil*, 10 April 1880, p. 52.
of gesturing identity such presentations fabricated. In this sense, his freedom to involve himself in the proactive construction of his public persona was exceptional. Thus, while elsewhere public attractions featuring ‘Fiji’ and ‘Fijian’ representations were almost exclusively assembled and promoted by Anglo-European colonial men, we see in Evarama’s self-styling as iconically Fijian a wholly unique public expression of identity. Even at the time of his arrival aboard the steamer the City of Melbourne, a number of reports noted Evarama’s unique appearance and manner: ‘His hair is woolly but his features are not at all negro-like, and have an intelligent and rather pensive expression. He spoke only a few words of English, and his behaviour was quiet, and unobtrusive’.  

Within this dynamic discourse it is possible to identify the operation of another kind of fashioning of culture; that of individual expressions of racial identity as social performance—a practice of the public self. The commodification of aspects of traditional Fijian culture for public performance was a process of hybridising local and regional Fijian rites as public entertainment. Within the prevailing narrative of colonisation, Evarama contributed a no less potent discourse of both individualism and racial identity. All around him forms of Fijian social and cultural life were becoming increasingly diversified—hybridised—as they split from previous traditions and amalgamated into new ones; constituting what Jan Nederveen Pieterse terms a ‘global mélange’. Rather than concentrating attention on the specifics of Pieterse’s thesis, the reference to his work is offered specifically to accord with his main argument, that is, cultural hybridity is not defined by and limited to modernity, but rather is a deeply-rooted phenomenon traversing human history. What makes this concept of an emerging global mélange all the more compelling as a discourse of change is Evarama’s figurative voice. Evarama’s active presence, while emerging within the grand narrative of colonialism, agitated and indeed fractured the integrity of the ethnographic displays that stylised the Fijian other contained by an idealised and unchanging past. In fact, it is highly likely that Evarama understood precisely the power of the public presentation of self as a marker of racial identity:

A Fine Head of Hair.—An amusing incident (says the “Herald”) occurred in the Supreme Court during the progress of the trial of the man Rosenwax, charged with robbery, The Fijian constable, Evarama, who was sent from Fiji in charge of the absconder, was in Court, and looking curiously at his Honor, Mr Justice Molesworth, asked—“Is him King of Melbourne?” He was informed that the learned judge had not

31 Melbourne Argus, 7 November 1871, p. 6.
32 Evarama’s celebrity occurred coincidentally with a significant development in the formalisation of Anglo-European theatre performance in Fiji. In June 1871, a small purpose-built theatre had been erected in Levuka. This was Fiji’s first theatre.
yet arrived at the enviable position of Molesworth Rex Melbourne, but he was the Judge. “Oh” then replied Evarama, looking at his Honor on the bench, and closely observing his wig, “Him have a fine head of hair.” (Wanganui Herald, V 1379, 26 January 1872, p. 2)

While the tone of the piece implies that Evarama misunderstands the significance of dress and power in relation to the context of a colonial Court of Law, a subversive reading could suggest that he understood precisely the semiotic currency of individualistic efforts to create specific impressions in the minds of others within the greater scheme of collective endeavour. For the better part of a year, Evarama had been narrating, through his body, physical inscriptions of race and masculinity for the interpretation of Anglo-colonials.

He had, after all, by this time become a literary event as much as a self-fashioned emblem of Fijian identity. The difference between what Colonials saw of ‘Fijian’ identity in the context of the ethnographical displays of Gardenhire and others, and Evarama’s private and public performances was thus immense. He had effectively not only reformulated a popular conception of ‘native Fijian’ material culture, but had also substituted a number of vital constituents in the grand colonial discourse of the Fijian other. He was neither a ‘cannibal’ nor a ‘cannibal chief’ as others such as ‘Narcoe’ were promoted to be. Evarama neither performed nor feigned aggression or noble ‘savagery’—the twin norms so commonplace in the discourse of contemporary reports of Fijians and the stylised character of the ‘noble savage’ contrived in ethnological displays. Neither had he been sold into enforced servitude, as Thakombau had done when expelling his captured Lovoni rebels (to W. C. Gardenhire). Nor, for that matter, had he been further commodified in other transactions brokered between commercial agents, as Gardenhire had done with his ‘Fiji curiosities’ (in his transaction with P. T. Barnum). Evarama’s agency as a Fijian man with a profession, a popular reputation and a public presence likely threw into question the representation of Fijian material culture normalised in both professional and amateur ethnographical displays of the period.

Just as the narrative of Elias Rosenwax emerged and developed in a cultural climate affirming an enduring interest in Fiji—and attempted to ratify the question of law reform between inter-Pacific colonies—so too did the narrative of Evarama, ‘native Fijian policeman’, emerge and develop in a diplomatic climate of insurgence, political unrest and imposed change in Fiji. Where in the Rosenwax story the man ultimately becomes an example of the reach of colonial law and order, aspects of the narrative of Evarama offer somewhat ambivalent

readings contrary to the grand narratives of colonialism, particularly with respect to implicit discourses of power in ethnological displays of the period. While the narratives of both men illustrated the intersections of various mechanisms of colonial power, Evarama in fact deployed aspects of Fijian material culture to construct, not one, but a variety of identities: Fijian, ‘native’, constable, swimmer, diver, among others.

As exposition, the extant texts detailing the story of Elias Rosenwax indeed offer insight into the significance of an unlikely figure, Evarama, within the broader context of grand colonial narratives. Yet as a form of cultural production, the surviving narrative sheds significant light on the deeply entrenched complexities of inter-racial contact during the early 1870s. Unlike Rosenwax, who while attempting to escape his criminal past was ultimately defined by it, Evarama’s demonstrations of self went beyond the realm of law to become unique expressions of his popular and cultural negotiations of Australian colonial society, as a Fijian. In the early 1870s, ethnological exhibits represented a key forum attempting to articulate particular values that, within the grander narrative of Australian colonialism, recreated cultures through oppressor-subject relationships. Here, fee-paying visitors observed stylised displays of the native other as static, manufactured re-creations. Meanwhile, a real-life Fijian swam in competitive races, plunged to remarkable depths in feats of aquatic endurance, and walked the streets of Melbourne in full native garb.

Nicole Anae graduated from Charles Sturt University with a B.Ed and Dip.T before earning her PhD through the Faculty of English, Journalism and European Languages at the University of Tasmania. Her research interests include the English literatures, Shakespeare, postmodern children’s literatures, and the interplay between literature, performance and identity. Her work typically explores encounters between literature and culture with a view to examining literature’s role in shaping cultural literacies.

Works Cited


34 The notice of Rosenwax’s death appears in Perth West Australian, 5 April 1905, p. 1.


Seitler, Dana. ‘Queer Physiognomies; Or, How Many Ways Can We Do the History of Sexuality?’ *Criticism* 46.1 (2004): 71-102.


This paper concerns Makereti Papakura (1873-1930), celebrity tourist guide of Rotorua, performer, tour organiser, English landed gentry and ultimately anthropologist. Known as ‘Maggie’ to tourists who found Makereti a challenge, she was famous enough in the first decade of the twentieth century in Aotearoa/New Zealand for a letter addressed to ‘Maggie, New Zealand’ actually to reach her (Makereti Papers). Though still well known in Aotearoa, she is little remembered elsewhere. Makereti made three voyages from New Zealand to England, and each is indicative of choices she made about her roles and the ways in which she would or would not be represented. The first was in 1911 as the organiser of a Maori concert party attending exhibitions associated with the Coronation of George V and Queen Mary in June of that year. The second was soon after in 1912, when she returned to marry the Englishman, Richard Staples-Brown, and take up residence on his estate in Oxfordshire. Later, having begun anthropological studies at Oxford University, research for her thesis brought her back to her home village of Whakarewarewa for six months of intensive field work and consultation in the first half of 1926. That voyage back to England in July 1926 was her last. In these quite distinct phases of her life, Makereti undertook a variety of tactics in response to both the range of colonising forces arrayed against her and the particular opportunities afforded her as a woman of mixed race. In this article I seek to examine how such tactics, though considerably varied over her lifetime, demonstrate a continuing assertion of Makereti’s own agency; because of her identification with the Arawa people, this invariably resulted in an accompanying assertion of Te Arawa agency.

I will refer to my subject as Makereti throughout. This is not to indicate a diminution by assumed familiarity that is sometimes attached to women, when their forenames are used almost exclusively instead of their surnames. She was born as Margaret Thom, married Joseph Dennan in 1891 (Stafford 53), and died, having remarried, as Margaret Staples-Brown, but her most commonly used surname was something of a stage name: Papakura. When a tourist in Whakarewarewa demanded to know her ‘Maori’ name, she provided one, taken from the nearby Papakura geyser (Stafford 56). Her brother and sister, also
performed, came to be known by this name as well. But she was Makereti, the Maori pronunciation of Margaret, or its shortening Ereti, for all of her life (Diamond 13).

Born of an English father and Arawa mother in 1873, Makereti was taken at an early age to live with her maternal uncle and aunt, following the practice of whangai in which children are raised by relatives. They spent much of their time in the bush surviving by traditional hunting, gathering and farming. As part of this upbringing, she was taught, and became proficient in, oral traditions by the age of nine, especially whakapapa (genealogy)—she could recite the lines from which she was descended and knew all the inter-relationships of her hapu—and the stories of her Maori ancestors (Dennan 47-8). Te Arawa scholar, Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, claims that portentous signs at her birth led the old people to induct her into ‘the special knowledge of Ngati Wāhiao and Ngati Tūhourangi … the treasures’ (146). According to her daughter-in-law, Guide Rangi Dennan, Makereti was regarded as ‘“te aho ariki”, the first born of the eldest line of noble and sacred ancestors … a descendant of all the chiefs back to the seven canoes, and to the gods themselves’ (47). Each stage of Makereti’s life reflects a very different approach to how she would survive economically and how she would present herself to others. These stages in turn meant different choices about presenting Maori to others, as much of her work, life and finally research were explicitly concerned with Maori self-representation, albeit in vastly different ways.

Tourist Enterprises at Home

The village of Whakarewarewa, adjacent to modern day Rotorua, was where Makereti made her home after leaving school. In terms of sustaining themselves, with the loss of land and a developing currency-based economy, many Tūhourangi and Ngāti Wāhiao, Te Arawa hapu (sub-tribes), turned to tourism in the rapidly changing country. With much of their ancestral lands on areas of geothermal activity, the village of Whakarewarewa had a small tourism industry functioning while she was a child, charging 3/- per person to cross the bridge into the village to see the geothermal features (Diamond 24). The village expanded to take in relatives made homeless by the eruption of Mt Tarawera in 1886; they suffered the loss of their significant income from tourist guiding on the Pink and White Terraces when these were destroyed in the eruption. Pressure came from government manoeuvres to take control of the tourist industry by acquiring more land; in fact, by ‘the turn of the twentieth century, the government owned most of the geothermal features around the Whakarewarewa village’ leaving the people in the village even more dependent on building an income base from other tourist-related activities (Diamond 39). Instead of functioning as
entrepreneurs controlling tourist attractions, ‘Te Arawa had been reduced, as a result of the Crown’s purchase activity, to little more than objects of curiosity for visiting tourists’ (O’Malley and Armstrong 219). Without control of the land, guiding and performance became the chief means of income: that and opening the village itself as a display. Once most avenues for income were cut off by pakeha and Government tactics, the village was extremely poor, even suffering an outbreak of typhoid (O’Malley and Armstrong 215-23).

Makereti was well-placed to play a prominent role in Whakarewarewa’s challenging economic circumstances and changing tourism industry; she had initiative, confidence and adaptability and she also spoke excellent English. Her father had taken over her education at the age of ten (Northcroft-Grant); she spent one year in an English style school, time with a governess, a stretch at the Rotorua District School and three further years at Hukarere, an Anglican boarding school for Maori girls in Napier (Makereti Papers; Stafford 53). She had grown up speaking only Maori and her brother teasingly called her a ‘Black Maori’ because of this (Diamond 25), but she soon showed an aptitude for understanding pakeha life and values; as she later told an English reporter of her first year away at school when she was teased: ‘That was the most horrible year of my life, but I learnt how you people think’ (Te Awekotuku 147). Going from being the treasured child in the bush to school in a vastly different cultural and language context must have been difficult, but Makereti clearly learnt and adapted. In this comment, she identifies explicitly as Maori and notably not as pakeha, perhaps not surprisingly as she was at the time a visiting performer in a Maori troupe, but as a child of mixed parentage she also chose to identify in other ways, and participated in the wider culture. For example, she was entitled to register as Maori on the electoral role in order to vote for specific Maori seats in Parliament, yet she chose to register for the ‘European’ seats, despite campaigning for Apirana Ngata, the Maori candidate (Diamond 15). Her identification with her Maori heritage did not prevent her from participating in a wider colonial mobility that was not confined to colonising figures (who often moved from post to post), but also to those who might be considered colonised.

With village income dropping to about a tenth of what it had been by 1898 (O’Malley and Armstrong 219), the compulsion to find alternative employment on almost no land was pressing. Despite her mixed parentage and relatively privileged education, Makereti was not immune from these pressures. She and her sister Bella gradually took charge of the Maori concert parties and guiding through the geo-thermal sites. By the time the group left for a London tour in 1911 they were seasoned performers, and Makereti had been working as performer, manager and promoter for some years. Tourism brought with it great intrusions from visitors though, with the village itself being one of the attractions; this had the effect of constructing Whakarewarewa as a site
for the display of its inhabitants as ‘native objects’ and Makereti played a prominent role in this. By the time she came to public attention, Makereti was an accomplished young woman, proficient in upper-class social interactions and culture through engaging with visitors to the village, as well as maintaining her deep knowledge of Maori genealogy and tradition. From early adulthood, she moved in and between worlds with a facility few could match. A bystander in Melbourne in 1910 reported on how she entered a restaurant in Maori dress and ordered the best French champagne; he exclaimed: ‘By Jove! She knows what’s what’ (Table Talk, 10 November 1910). More significantly, her knowledge and genealogy brought her respect in her home community. But she had another quality, that Polynesian marker that is easy to identify but hard to quantify or describe: mana (authority, power, charisma, sacredness), which had an impact on those of any race or class who encountered her.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, reflecting these qualities, Makereti underwent a change in public status and this is seen in the postcards produced during the time. The period marks ‘a golden age for postcards’, with ‘billions in circulation’, especially in Europe and the US (Desmond 43). Postcards functioned in synecdochic relationship to the tourist sites they referenced, and in order to do so they needed to be distinctive and recognisable (Desmond 43-4). As the leading guide of the village, Makereti mediated the tourist experience and many of the postcards sold featured images of her. These postcards show a development in both her agency and the power she increasingly took over her own representation, albeit within limited discourses, as she moves from objectified Maori maiden to full-blown national celebrity, in charge of much of her own promotion. Early images negotiate with contemporaneous notions of the ‘native’, the ‘south seas belle’, the ‘Dusky maiden’ and the ‘primitive’, especially as these interact with the tropes of colonial photography (Jolly 99-122; Tamaira 1; Torgovnick). One of the more common of these tropes was the tendency for indigenous people to be ‘identified only by costume or perhaps a single cultural artefact’ (Whittaker, ‘A Century’ 426). In the following photographs, we see the use of Maori costume and the single artefact as one of the strongest guiding principles in the construction of images. Max Quanchi mentions the use of such ‘types’ in Samoan photography of the same period, in which studio poses of young men or women wearing traditional headdresses and holding ‘clubs or knives’ had already become ‘a cliché’, widely available in the region, including New Zealand, by 1907 (208).
This image (Figure 1) was first used in 1901 before the royal visit of the Duke and Duchess of York brought Makereti to national attention later the same year, and was not, to my knowledge, used as a postcard, but rather featured in the press. The korowai (woven cloak), hei tiki pounamu (greenstone carved human pendant) around the neck, and huia feather¹ worn in her hair evoke Maori identity for New Zealand viewers, but they also suggest a generalised ‘native’ one, especially for those outside the country. (Just as exhibitions of the time often used artefacts, dances and even peoples interchangeably in ‘native’ performances, so in colonial photography, ethnographic accuracy was not always paramount.) Makereti lies on her side on the woven mat, looking somewhat uncomfortable with her head propped on her hand, yet gazing back

¹ The huia, or New Zealand wattle bird, is now extinct, with the last confirmed sighting in 1907, suggesting that to even own feathers at that time was a mark of status.
toward the viewer. Her pose, while evoking the ‘sexually saturated figure of the Polynesian woman’ (Jolly 99), with hints of nakedness under the cloak, does so within the bounds of respectability.

The setting, among the ferns, draws an affinity with nature, supposedly a quality of the ‘native’ and of the ‘primitive’ (Torgovnick 8). Rhythmic continuity between Makereti’s hair, the tassels of the cloak (designed to move with the wearer), and the surrounding ferns and grasses accentuates this. The lack of markers of time, suggesting an ahistorical space, furthers the notion that the ‘native’ is not part of the contemporary world and therefore insignificant in national life. A similar strategy can be seen in the representation of Hawaiians during the same period. Hawaii’s burgeoning tourist industry was predicated, especially in visuals, on the construction of a dichotomy between the ‘modern’ visitor and the ‘primitive’ Hawaiian: ‘Such a strategy lays bare the process of constructing the primitive as the necessary complement to modernity by denying the coevalness of the viewer and the viewed’ (Desmond 40). The practice of ‘decontemporizing’, as ‘a necessary way of “nativizing” the Native Hawaiian population’ (Desmond 40) can also be seen in these New Zealand images featuring Makereti, in which no signs of contemporary life are in evidence. The tourist viewer is free to see the subject of the photograph as ‘native’ in contrast to his or her position in modernity. Whittaker claims that ‘It was the photography related to tourism that disseminated a pervasive visual discourse about race’ (‘Photographing Race’ 117). There had already been a substantial history of photography in which ‘types’ were constructed and explained, through specific discourses, in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Within a supposedly educational context, ‘types’ were explained in ethnographic and biological terms, continuing the Victorian preoccupation with classification and taxonomy, and often perpetuating a vision of the world which was Social Darwinist in drive. For colonisers, this was part of the technology of racial ‘science’ that propped up unequal systems of power. As Christopher Pinney so persuasively argues, the truth claims of both anthropology and photography were fragile at best and needed specific textual strategies in order to erase the signs of their own construction (74-91).
Figure 2: c. 1901-1910. Makareti (Maggie) Papakura at Te Taura meeting house, Whakarewarewa. William Andrew Collis.

Reproduced by permission of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, NZ. PAColl-6407-83.
Yet there are other ways of reading the image. Many would know the significance of the ancestral hei tiki around Makereti’s neck, and the huia feather in her hair as evocation of her birth and status as ariki (noble). Though not in full control of the image, Makereti can be seen to be asserting her identity, however it might be read by others. Similarly, Bella Papakura countered the potential objectification of her village and its inhabitants when guiding by insisting on ‘treating those guided around Whakarewarewa not as tourists but as manuhiri (visitors)’ (O’Malley and Armstrong 229). Such understandings promote a counter discourse in which the display of locals for outsiders, for pay, could maintain continuity with cultural traditions of hospitality while resisting modern commodification of people as objects. These tactics are important tools in countering the ways in which the long drawn out process of colonialism undermined both identity and dignity. During personal interactions it was much easier to resist; in static forms, such as photographs, it was more difficult, especially when images were used on postcards for sale that were decontextualised by circulation.

In this image (Figure 2), Makereti appears with a single artefact, in this case a mere pounamu (greenstone short-handled weapon). While potentially signifying readiness for battle, weapon artefacts in the genre of tourist postcard are seen to signify ‘native’ rather than antagonism, as there are no indications of aggression: quite the contrary, as Makereti looks away from the camera, allowing the viewer unimpeded gaze. As a representative of Maori at Whakarewarewa, this apparent submission speaks to the function of the whole group, reassuring the white viewer that there is no threat here, either to the colonial eye or to colonial activity. The superb carving of Te Raura meeting house behind her, and indeed dwarfing her, accentuates her position as part of the display that is the tourist experience in the village. Once again there is rhythmic continuity between Makereti and this backdrop, though rather than indicating affinity with nature, she is here positioned to show affinity with traditional culture, as exemplified by Te Raura, with the long vertical lines of her piupiu (skirt), blending with the vertical slats that make up the walls. The viewer’s eye is drawn to Makereti: she is framed by the doorposts, and juxtaposed with the strong female figure on the left, while the darkened interior (which remains unseen by the viewer), draws attention to her face. Yet a range of elements also suggest Makereti’s power, despite the invitation to the viewer to gaze. This is especially seen via the correspondence with the female ancestor figure, also shown wearing huia feathers and directly gazing at the viewer; it is further emphasised by the other challenging eyes in the carvings on the door posts. While the meeting house backdrop may have been used for its scenic and exotic function by the photographer, it also speaks of heritage, lineage and cultural assurance.
Figure 3: c. 1910. Makereti (Maggie) Papakura. William Henry Thomas.
Reproduced by permission of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, NZ. G-3055-1/1.
This image (Figure 3) shows Makereti in bare feet, wearing a kahu kiwi (kiwi feather cloak) over her piupiu, and holding a taiaha (staff-like weapon), and it makes no reference to any contemporary aspects of her life; rather, she is aligned with the landscape, the thermal steam rising around her, as wisps of her hair lift in the breeze. This primitivist depiction shows Makereti as outside any specific time frame, and her gaze, away from the viewer and into the distance, once again suggests that she is unconcerned with the present, as well as submissive to the gaze. As ‘woman’ and ‘native’ this conflation with the landscape is doubly inscribed. Maori might read this image differently though. Once again, the feather signals her birth as ariki, and the extremely precious kahu kiwi cloak is a taonga (priceless heirloom) with connections to both ancestors and spiritual forces, as is the hei tiki. Identification with ancestral land and its features can be read as an assertion of rights, ownership and privileges, rather than as a submission to colonising forces. Holding the taiaha, which is decorated with tufts of hair and carving, and looking relaxed, Makereti is proclaiming her status as chiefly (Te Rangi 277), and potentially her right to speak ceremonially as a result of this.

In both Figures 2 and 3, the images also engage with a wider history of the Polynesian woman as the object of voyeuristic gaze and fantasy. This dominant history of representation has seen the Polynesian woman over-inscribed, both in literary and visual history, as not only inherently sexual but sexually available, especially to the white male. From Cook and Banks, to Melville, Gauguin, Becke, London, Michener and in numerous filmic and photographic representations up until the present time, a set of tropes has worked to reinforce these perceptions and to encode the female Polynesian body in quite limited ways, as outlined by Margaret Jolly (99-122). In these images, Makereti’s long hair, flowing free in contrast to pakeha conventions of respectability, links her with this tradition, as do the glimpses of skin on her shoulders and feet (Jolly 106-7). That these photos are constructed in deliberate alignment with such conventions is suggested by the fact that in everyday life Makereti wore her hair up, sometimes in plaits, and usually covered with a cerise head scarf, a style that became something of a uniform for Whakarewarewa guides. She also often wore typical western dress of the time, again suggesting identification with a wider colonial identity, even expressing a colonial cosmopolitanism. While Makereti can be seen to resist dominant conventions about representing the Polynesian woman by remaining fully clothed and to some extent in control of the image, it is difficult to escape the historical over-inscription. Even aside from this particular history, the subject’s averted gaze encourages a voyeuristic gaze in the viewer, as it allows us to look without the return gaze of the subject.

Makereti’s diary entries of 1907-8 show that she organised photographic sittings and ordered the printing of photographs and postcards for sale in the village
and beyond. That conventions around representation are on display in these postcards is not surprising, yet at the same time Makereti shows a high level of control over the production and distribution of the images. One image that has become well known recently is that shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: 1905. Maggie Papakura. E.W. Payton.

This photo, which to my knowledge was not made into a postcard, shows her looking defiantly in direct address at the photographer, apparently tired of the whole process of performing the role of exotic photographic model. Despite having similar elements to the earlier figures, nothing about this image connotes lack of control, objectification or submission. Rather, we see a woman who is tired of the routine, but going through with it anyway. Increasingly, the kinds of images Makereti chose for distribution and those which appeared in the press shift from those connoting universalised ‘native’ or ‘Polynesian belle’ to distinctive ones indicating the specificity of Makereti’s world.

Figure 5: c. 1910. Makareti (Maggie) Papakura in her whare. William Henry Thomas Partington, Auckland Star Collection.

This photograph (Figure 5) moves away from the primitivism and stereotypical images previously shown to present a quite different conception of Makereti. The image is just as constructed, but its combination of elements evokes a specific personality rather than the over-inscribed ‘dusky maiden’ (Tamaira 1). Signifiers of the ‘native’ are still prominent in the image; Makereti wears the heirloom hei tiki and kahu kiwi feather cloak, and goes barefoot while surrounded by carved taonga, notable among which is the kumete whakairo (carved lidded presentation bowl) near her feet. There are also cloaks, both korowai and piupiu, hanging from the wall, and another korowai under her feet. But the organisation of these clothing items now evokes home life more strongly than exoticism, as they are slung up out of the way. The traditional items are contextualised in a way they were not in previous images; they can be read as possessions by a western viewer (even if varying understandings of possession and material culture in Maori life cannot so easily be read). But Makereti also wears a dress under the cloak, along with long flowing hair, blending with the kiwi feathers, and bare feet. One might consider the composition as ‘hybrid’, though this suggests an artificial lifestyle binary in which Maori were out of the contemporary world. Makereti and her people were part of the colonial world, albeit one constrained by the depredations of colonisation, rather than existing in ahistorical cultural isolation; hence hybridity is an inaccurate cultural description. I also take Albert Wendt’s point that ‘“Hybrid”, no matter how theorists, like Homi Bhabha, have tried to make it post-colonial, still smacks of the racist colonial’ (Wendt).

The image is significant because here Makereti engages with signs of education, in the form of desk, books and writing set, hinting at her future life as a student and writer. These place her in a particular time and place, as do the array of cards from around the world and the selection of photographs. The titles of some her book collection are visible: The Living Rulers of Mankind, by H.N. Hutchinson (1902); The History of ‘Punch’, by M.H. Spielmann (1895), and Kim, by Rudyard Kipling (1901) are notable. The former is a contemporary overview of the world’s rulers, the second implies a metropolitan sensibility, while Kipling’s account of imperialism, ‘the great game’ and cross-cultural masquerade, is another sign of the mobility of colonial culture that Makereti participated in. She is occupied with writing, without acknowledgement of the camera, but there is no sense of submission in this; rather, she demonstrates her agency and engagement with the wider world. Some newspaper readers would have been familiar with her letters to the press defending Maori haka performances when they were attacked for being indecent and crude (Diary). The image indicates not so much a transition in her own life, but rather a change in the representation of it. Makereti’s persona came to signify much more than the tropes of colonial photography as she moved into celebrity rather than stereotype. There was enough public interest in her for shots like this of her
new carved home Tuhoromatakaka to feature ‘in photo spreads in the picture papers during 1910’ (Diamond 97). Celebrity life is ultimately one she rejects, but it was to have a final expansive phase on tour to London for the Coronation.

The London Tour

The tour was organised after repeated requests from entrepreneurs, and Makereti negotiated with an Australian syndicate regarding pay and conditions. The troupe included a brass band, a quartet, and the singer Iwa, who was met with rapturous responses wherever she sang and who stayed in London to have a music hall career for several years afterward as ‘Princess Iwa’. The Maori carved village was also open for visitors to tour, with the quotidian activities of its occupants seen to be an authentic depiction of Maori village life. Ambivalence on the question of human displays in these exhibitions was indicated in the British press by comments such as the following, which despite its general disapproval still indicates interest: ‘In spite of the ransacking of the world that goes on to give London savage thrills, we have rarely seen Maoris here’ (Manchester Daily Guardian, 31 May 1911). While the exhibitions associated with the Coronation were having their runs in 1911, the city also played host to the First Universal Races Congress, held at the University of London, 26-29 July 1911 (Holton). The apparent extremes occupied by these two events—native displays on the one hand and the Congress on the other—indicate the range of thinking about race and empire at the time, but they also present a somewhat false dichotomy. One might suppose that the Congress would break down racial stereotypes while the display villages reinforced them, but in the case of this Maori tour it was not so simple. Exposure to those from different places and cultures in the native village did not always serve as an object lesson in European or American superiority, but could rather begin to break down assumptions of superiority. It also provided a unique opportunity for the metropolitan public to find itself reflected back through eyes that critiqued, as well as praised its achievements. For a touring indigenous party, this particular group received an enormous amount of press, and through it we can read their public impressions of London and English culture, among other things.

Initially the press positions the group as completely Other to those from the metropolitan centre. Consider this page from the Illustrated London News detailing the Maori response to the royal opening of the Festival of Empire: ‘New Zealand’s Primitive Inhabitants Greet Their King’:

Twice the Royal carriage halted for their Majesties to gaze upon the scene, and at the second time there was a strange and thrilling episode. … These dark children of the Southern seas, with their long black hair
and lustrous eyes, and brown, bare limbs, women as well as men in their native dress, seemed to go mad upon the moment of seeing the great White Chief. They yelled to him a strange and wild chant, dancing up and down, and beating the turf with their naked feet, waving their war clubs, laughing and clapping their hands and shouting continually with extraordinary excitement. (20 May 1911)

This simplistic projection of primitivism onto the group and their performance of the haka, along with the assumption of their subservience to the King, indicates that initially their position as childlike and unsophisticated was very strongly entrenched in the popular press and, one assumes, in its readership. Bare skin and long, unbridled hair are also emphasised, evoking the long tradition of ‘dusky maidens’. This was typical of many early depictions of the Maori group, and their exoticism of course makes it more sensational. What is notable about the London press though, is how on closer acquaintance it changed its tune.

Once Makereti had actually been interviewed and reporters had the chance to engage with her and other members of her party, the tone of press reports changed markedly; this statement from a British journalist is typical:

Who is the most accomplished, the most gracious, the most winning stranger in London this great Coronation season? Maggie the Maori. If you don’t believe me, if you think I am exaggerating, if you find it difficult to understand how a Maori can be accomplished, gracious, or winning, go to the Crystal Palace, visit the Maori Village, and try to get a few minutes of conversation with Maggie, the unanimously elected Chieftainness of the Tribe. (The Sketch, 4 May 1911, 194)

Her social facility and range of cultural capital ultimately endeared her, and much of her touring party, to the press. A reporter commented that ‘Looking at her as she sat … back in her chair, wearing an everyday English white silk blouse and dark skirt, it was difficult indeed to imagine that her surroundings were in any way novel to her’ (Daily Mail, 1 May 1911). Like many journalists, this writer was at pains to emphasise her facility in the metropolitan centre, and though there are inherently imperial assumptions underlying the surprise expressed, the writer is unable to dismiss Makereti as a simple colonised Other. Accordingly, Makereti also assumes she has a real place in the Empire being celebrated and that she is not cut off from the imperial inheritance. She seems to take the empire at its word, in its rhetoric of civilisation, conversion and progress, speaking of England as ‘the old country’. ‘We, too, regard it as “home,” like other Colonials’, she told the Daily Chronicle (1 May 1911). It is almost like a dare to the imperial centre, to make good on its promises. Though the complications of coming from a tribal group that was kupapa (had fought with Crown forces in the wars) is beyond the scope of this article, it may have
played a role in this apparent identification (Belich 286). During this tour Makereti became a celebrity in Britain; by September it was claimed that she was receiving over 300 letters a day from the British public (‘John Bull’).2

However comfortable she may have appeared as spokesperson and manager for the touring party, it was a life she was soon to leave behind. The tour was a financial disaster for its backers, despite the hard work of the performers themselves (Stafford 56). While there, Makereti became reacquainted with Richard Staples-Brown, a wealthy farmer she had met in New Zealand, who owned several properties in Oxfordshire. In accepting his offer of marriage, she was very clear that this would mark an end to her life as a celebrity. The marriage offered financial security which allowed her to leave the day to day work of guiding and managing cultural performances. Instead, she moved into a manor house, had a club in London, household servants, and a life of relative luxury, at least initially. She was also removed from New Zealand village life, and this may have been welcome after conflict and violence which followed her return from the London tour, when half of the party stayed on in London, much to the disappointment of their relatives (Makereti Scrapbook).

From the time of her acceptance of the marriage proposal, she explicitly refused celebrity life. She was extremely annoyed when her engagement was announced in Britain and Aotearoa/New Zealand before she arrived home, and after the wedding she wrote to her friend T.E. Donne, the former secretary for Tourism in Aotearoa/New Zealand: ‘Very few people know [I] am in Eng & I do not want anything to go to the newspapers. … Besides I had retired from public life many months ago & have no wish to have my name in print again’ (Diamond 130). In 1924 she refused to take part in a Maori Pageant in London, insisting in a letter that ‘My old name must not be used in either shape or form whatever’ (Makereti Scrapbook qMS-0621, 73). Eventually she acquiesced and took part, writing, ‘I must try & not let them have the Maori misunderstood. … Only for this reason did I join them’ (qtd in Diamond 145). The demands of upper-middle class respectability in England may have also influenced her decision to withdraw, but it seems that once she had the means to stop the performing life and its accompanying celebrity status, she did so. Along with her desire to retire from public life, the drive to protect Maori culture continued, but it found its clearest outlet in anthropological studies at Oxford University.

---

2 See Treagus and Diamond for more extensive discussions of the London tour.
The Anthropologist

In 1922, Makereti became an associate member of the Oxford Anthropology Society, and in 1927 joined the University to study anthropology. In the meantime, her marriage had ended and she was once again in financial difficulty until the divorce could be granted. Despite this, in North Oxford, and in each place she lived in England, she had a ‘New Zealand Room’, in which she hung her precious cloaks and stored many other taonga. She made a final trip back to New Zealand in the first half of 1926, living in her former house there. Her sister Bella was still involved in guiding and tourism, while Makereti had become a great lady who, her relatives recalled, ate with a knife and fork instead of her fingers. She used this trip to gather further anthropological data from her own people, before returning to the UK on her final crossing. Sadly, she died suddenly in 1930, just three weeks before her work was to be submitted as her thesis at Oxford.

The thesis, eventually published as The Old Time Maori, is an assertion of traditional knowledge and values. It begins, as many anthological studies would, with a description of tribal and family organisation. In line with traditional Maori values though, this is expressed in genealogical lines, whakapapa—her own—demonstrating her descent from four original chiefly lines. This is part of the oral history she learnt as a young child. In his introduction to her work, T.K. Penniman, her friend, who became curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum the year after it was finally published, recorded that ‘She wrote regularly to her people at home to make certain that they were willing to allow the publication of various facts, or that the facts were exactly right’ (Penniman 25). This is therefore something of a collaborative effort, as all anthropological projects are, though many are not fully acknowledged as such.

Pacific scholars White and Tengan have suggested that anthropological ‘disciplinary models and practices—from fieldwork to publication—have worked historically to authorize and reinforce dichotomies that separate native subjects from anthropological agents’ (389). There has been limited understanding of the roles of indigenous inquirers, who are usually cast as ‘native informants’, rather than scholars capable of analysing the material ‘correctly’. Accordingly, in contemporary reviews of her work, Makereti was largely dismissed by male pakeha anthropological reviewers. Ralph Piddington, for example, asserts: ‘Unfortunately, Makereti’s lack of any conception of what it is important to record about a primitive people, and the personal character of her approach, produce an incoherent and highly idealized picture of Maori life’ (78). Similarly, Eric Ramsden assumes that Makereti could not, as a woman, have the required knowledge to even write an anthropological account of her people: ‘Though members of her sex had a definitely honoured place in ancient
Maori society, they were never the repositories of sacred knowledge’ (191). The breathtaking arrogance of these responses hardly needs commenting on. Makereti’s determination to write her own account of her people seems to have been partly motivated by the desire to correct misconceptions she found in the work of other scholars, but these misconceptions continued well after her death. Somewhat surprisingly, it is *The Illustrated London News* that demonstrates the clearest sense of what Makereti’s book had achieved, giving it a full page article entitled ‘Maori Life From Within: By An Oxford-Trained Chieftainess’: ‘Outside observation, however painstaking, of other people’s odd customs can never be so revealing as explanation from within’ (Squire 480).

In *The Old Time Maori*, Makereti is both the ‘native informant’ and the scholar. This is just one of the ways in which she disrupts the usual fieldwork paradigm. She also places value on aspects of Maori culture that had been ignored by male *pakeha* scholars, including some of the men she had assisted in writing their works. She writes of childbirth and placentas, menstruation and menopause, child rearing and marriage and of protocol and ritual. She outlines agricultural and farming practices, control of food resources, and shows that life was organised, planned and abundant. As she does so, she engages with other scholars, pointing out where practices have been described but misunderstood. There is a strong sense of writing back, in the postcolonial sense, to earlier and contemporary writers. She also refuses to record everything, choosing to keep some cultural elements secret. This explicitly includes *karakia* (prayers and incantations) that she regarded as being too sacred to include or if included to translate. Makereti felt no compulsion to make all of Te Arawa culture available to western anthropology. Fortunately Penniman, who oversaw the publication, was respectful enough to carry out her wishes.

He suggests that ‘So intimately bound up with her people was she, that she could not write their history without unconsciously writing her own’ (20). Rather than being an unconscious move, I would suggest that she still saw herself as inextricably part of the culture she wrote about, and that the division between individual and group identity is an assumption that has its basis in western traditions of individualism, and not in Maori ones. Mary Louise Pratt has coined the term ‘autoethnographic text’ to refer to ‘a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them’ (7). While this is not a conventional autobiography, as an autoethnographic text *The Old Time Maori* challenges both fieldwork reports and conventional autobiography, by presenting identity as collective, grounded in oral tradition and resistive of existing studies. Despite its reception, Makereti’s work is increasingly referred to by Maori scholars today. In writing it Makereti
comes full circle in the sense that she recalls her early life in the bush with deep affection, and also mourns its passing, and the passing of a lifestyle that was last prevalent in the nineteenth century.

The identities adopted by Makereti appear to take dramatically different forms over the course of her life, yet she worked with what she had, finding agency in each particular situation, however limited. Even when potentially cast as ‘native object’, Makereti employed ‘the performativity of the stereotype’ as a ‘prop’ on which to fashion identities that would be useful to her and her people (Apter 18). In doing so, she enacted the tactic outlined by A Marata Tamaira, ‘in which the dusky maiden, of her own volition, shifts shape and direction’ to forge her own subjectivity (3).

Mandy Treagus is Head of English and Creative Writing at the University of Adelaide. She researches Victorian, Australian and postcolonial literatures and film, and cultural history. Her work has appeared in the Journal of Postcolonial Writing, Kunapipi, Australasian Victorian Studies Journal, Outskirts and The International Journal of the History of Sport. Her current project explores the display of Pacific peoples in colonial exhibitions and has appeared in several edited collections.

Acknowledgements

I thank the Te Arawa Maori Trust Board for its encouragement of the project that led to this article, and also Makereti’s relatives, June Northcroft-Grant and Jim Schuster, for their generosity in sharing family stories. I also thank two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments, as well as my colleague Ros Prosser for her encouragement and suggestions, and Carolyn Lake for her usual efficient assistance. I would also like to thank the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand (Figs 2, 3 and 5) and the Rotorua Museum of Art & History, Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa, Rotorua, New Zealand (Fig. 4) for permission to reproduce the images used in this essay.
Works Cited


Makereti Scrapbook. Alexander Turnbull Library, qMS-0621.


*Table Talk*, 10 November 1910.


*The Sketch*, 4 May 1911, 194. Makereti Papers.


Between Women: Indenture, Morality and Health

Margaret Mishra

Indentured women in Fiji collectively challenged their exploitation in the sugar-cane plantations from the late 1800s to the early 1900s. The primary forum used to articulate their grievances and oppose their maltreatment was the Indian Women’s Committee. The activism of this Committee was particularly intense from 1913 to 1920 when its platform intersected with international campaigns in India to abolish the indenture system. During this period, parallel resistances were mounted by the Australasian Committee of Inquiry into the Social and Moral Conditions of Indentured Women in Fiji. This Committee, comprising Australian, New Zealand and Indian women, adopted transnational principles to advance the social and moral position of indentured women in Fiji. While the Committee may be critiqued for furthering patriarchal constructions of morality and femininity that converged with discourses of colonialism, imperialism and Indian nationalism, this article will demonstrate that it simultaneously played a critical role in improving the quality of life for indentured women in Fiji, particularly in the area of women’s health.

Situating Women’s Resistances during Indenture

After Fiji’s cession to Britain on 10 October 1874, the Governor General of the British colonial government, Sir Arthur Gordon, sought a cheap, external source of labour allegedly to protect and perpetuate the indigenous Fijian way of life in the villages (Lal 4). His solution was to introduce the system of Indian labour recruitment which Indians referred to as girmit. From 1879 to 1919, approximately 13,696 Indian women and 54,784 Indian men were transported to Fiji under this agreement (Lateef 2). At the end of the five year term, labourers could either return to India or renew the contract for an additional five years. Historical accounts suggest that some Indian women came to Fiji to escape from economic hardship, domestic quarrels and oppressive cultural rituals and practices, for example, the dowry system (Lal 57; see also Naidu 19-23). Others were lured or kidnapped by unscrupulous recruiters who promised them an abundant supply of food and relaxed working conditions. Fijian feminist Shireen Lateef confirms the trickery of some recruiters as she relates how her grandmother came to Fiji: ‘While my grandmother was getting water from a well, a recruiter
approached her and asked her whether she would like to go to Fiji, a faraway place where there was good weather, picturesque surroundings, easy work and plenty of food. Without telling anyone, she left with him immediately’ (Lateef 2). The reality, of course, was quite the opposite. As wage-earners, mothers and wives, Indian women in Fiji were subjected to poor living conditions, physical and sexual violence, long hours of work on the plantations, and wage cuts for low attendance during sickness and pregnancy (Lal 57; see also Andrews 26). Unsurprisingly, these exploitative circumstances, often likened to a form of slavery or narak (hell), triggered a series of militant resistances. Many of these vocal, public, and sometimes violent contestations were led by Indian women.

In the years between the late 1800s and early 1900s, for instance, indentured women workers established a forum called the Indian Women’s Committee where they could collectively challenge their multiple oppressions (Mishra 39). Human rights activist Shiasta Shameem narrates how this Committee, colloquially known as ‘the Women’s Gang’, led a series of protests against the physical, sexual and economic exploitation of indentured women in the cane belts of Fiji (274). These resistances arose out of women's marginalised statuses as labourers, mothers and wives. The most common form of resistance involved physically confronting men who sexually violated indentured women and beating them up. Sometimes the punishment entailed pinning the overseer down and taking turns at urinating on him, or walking over him until he excreted (Naidu 19). Indentured women consciously employed, in reverse, the same tactics of violence, humiliation and degradation that they themselves were incessantly exposed to, to lay bare the impact of male violence. This method of resistance not only furthered a mutual dependence among women but also involved drawing indentured men into the ‘orbit of plantation resistance’ (Shameem 274). In this sense, the activism of indentured women in the early 1900s could not be separated from a partnership with men who shared, to borrow an expression from postcolonial theorists, ‘the experience of the politics of oppression and repression’ (Ashcroft et al. 250).

The second method of resistance adopted by indentured women involved heading strikes and riots in Suva, Rewa and Navua during the 1920s. During this period, the Indian Women’s Committee spoke officially on behalf of female and male labourers. While these protests took place in the public sphere, they often intersected with issues of concern in the private sphere. In 1920, for example, *The Fiji Times and Herald* reported that the Indian Women’s Committee led a deputation to the Governor petitioning for higher wages and an official inquiry into escalating food prices (‘Commission to Enquire into the Cost of Living’ 7). The official representative for the deputation was Jaikumari Manilal, wife of Fiji’s first Indian barrister Dr. Manilal Maganlal. Although Jaikumari, a middle-class Indian woman and satyagarha activist trained at Gandhi’s ashram in Gujarat, wrote petitions and organised meetings and demonstrations, she was
never physically present at the riots (Kelly 61). Therefore, while she was the agent that threatened the colonial order, her contribution to the 1920 strikes was very different from the physical attacks against male colonial officials led by indentured women like Fulqhar, Rahiman, Rachael, Sonia, Mungri, Kalan, Ladu, Majullah, Hansraj, Dreemal, Hanki, Dwarka, Junkaom and Etwari. At a strike on February 23, *The Fiji Times and Herald* reported that this group of frenzied, kava-drinking, veiled women attacked colonial officials Constable Reay and Mr. Savage with doga sticks as they chanted ‘hit, beat, kill’ (*Indian Riot: Women the Cause*’ 9). In March 1920, these women were imprisoned by the colonial government for these radical confrontations and Jaikumari was deported to India for instigating the cost of living strike and organising women into protest groups (Colonial Secretary’s Office, ‘The Select Committee’, MS No.2352). What is particularly noteworthy here is the way the fight against economic oppression was inseparable from the battle against colonialism and patriarchy.

At the same time, another group of women across the seas was deeply disturbed by the plight of their sisters in Fiji. On 25 August 1920, *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported: ‘Recent official communications from Fiji reveal in interesting detail the unostentatious and humanitarian efforts, not widely known, of a band of Australian and New Zealand women to improve the moral and social conditions of Indian women in Fiji’ (*Indian Women: Social Conditions in Fiji*’ 9). It is this interesting detail that I wish to recover in this article—this minor historical account1 of how Australian and New Zealand women collaborated with middle-class women from India to form the Australasian Committee of Inquiry into the Social and Moral Conditions of Indian Women in Fiji on 27 May 1918. Set against a backdrop of patriarchal morality that intersected with discourses of colonialism, imperialism, Christianity and Indian nationalism, it is evident that this Committee fostered a homogenous notion of universal sisterhood. Although parallel resistances were mounted by indentured women as they agitated for their basic human rights, such as access to food, within the context of colonialism and indenture, a convergence did not take place between the trajectories of women’s resistances until Australasian women began to lobby for the attainment of basic human rights for indentured women, for example, access to adequate health care and facilities.

The activism of the Australasian Committee of Inquiry may be categorised into two broad phases. During the first phase (1916-1918), the Committee demonstrated a preoccupation with cultivating and reinforcing stereotypical feminine virtues like purity and chastity. The focus of this phase was on a

---

1 The term *minor history* was coined by Sudesh Mishra in his keynote address delivered at the International Scientific Conference in Mauritius on 5 December, 2011. See “Bending Closer to the Ground”: Girmit as Minor History” in this issue of AHR.
male-centred notion of traditional morality, in particular, an endorsement of the patriarchally-constructed view that men and women’s morality should be assessed differently. When the Committee argued that women should be virtuous, pure and chaste, they reinforced ‘ethical double standards’ (Mill 10) imposed by patriarchal society. However, as the Committee of Inquiry began to lobby for health and reproductive rights for indentured women during the second phase (1918-1922), they also assisted women to fulfill other interconnected fundamental human rights, such as the right to employment. This was a critical turning point for the Committee because the act of caring for women’s bodies was a definite step towards women’s empowerment. I will begin with a discussion of the first phase.

Patriarchal Morality (1916-1918)

Vices and Virtues

Indentured women featured in colonial exchanges, often in passing as a footnote or afterthought, and other times as objects of much deliberation, especially when they transgressed the neatly demarcated boundaries of femininity. The latter is illustrated in ‘A Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji’ written by representatives of the Indian Government Reverend Charles Freer Andrews and William Pearson in 1916. I cite this report here because it triggered a series of events that led to the formation of the Committee of Inquiry. As it broached the subject of women’s morality, or rather their alleged immorality, it invoked anger and concern among Australasian women and incited them to take action. Like Andrews and Pearson, they were gravely concerned that the practice of disproportionately recruiting forty women for every one hundred men was the primary cause of a ‘strange, unaccountable epidemic of vice’ (Andrews and Pearson 27) in the coolie lines. At this point, the eroding moral status of the so-called ‘simple, ignorant, coolie woman’ (Andrews and Pearson 11) becomes a central issue of contention. In the report, she is juxtaposed against the middle-class Indian woman and a series of binary oppositions emerge. The middle-class Indian woman is identified with virtues of chastity, honour (izzat), discipline and devotion, while descriptions of indentured women pivot around vices like promiscuity. In this sense, the middle-class Indian woman becomes the benchmark for assessing morality among indentured women in Fiji. Another cause of anxiety for Andrews and Pearson, and this worry was also shared by Australasian women, was the indentured woman’s inability to fulfil the most sacred duty of an Indian woman which was ‘to cook her husband’s food and look after his home’ (10). Essentialist images of women as mothers and wives are naturalized throughout the report.
Between Women: Indenture, Morality and Health

Sisterhood and Honour

Missionary Florence Garnham notes that Andrews and Pearson’s 1916 Report ‘made a great impression on the Indian people’ (10) including the Viceroy, who announced on 20 March 1916, that the indentured system would be abolished at the earliest date. When the Indian public learnt in January 1917 that the system would not be abolished for five more years, prominent middle-class Indian women took to the streets and began pleading before ‘immense audiences for the honour of their sisters’ in Fiji (‘Ladies UrgeCancellation of Indentures’ 13; see also Garnham 12). Honour became a metaphor for sisterhood. As Indian women fought fervently for this highly regarded virtue, caste and other differences were promptly set aside. This was a critical moment for Indian women given the strict social stratification of Indian society into Brahman (priest), Kshatriya (ruler, warrior and landowner), Vaishya (merchants), Shudra (artisans, agriculturalists) and Harijan (untouchable) castes (Singh 11).

However, there were other specific instances, where Indian women used their caste and status in society to raise a public outcry about the exploitation and abuse of Indian women in Fiji. In 1918, for example, Indian women met at the Vanity Vishram Hall in Bombay to urge the Government of India to prohibit the continuation of the indenture system. Chair of the meeting Lady Pherozeshah Mehta stressed that the indenture system was ‘fraught with hideous immorality … under which the honour of a woman was not safe’ (‘Ladies UrgeCancellation of Indentures’ 13). Mrs. Jaijee Petit also led a deputation of women to the Viceroy to plead for an end to the recruiting process (Andrews 20). If we accept feminist scholar Uma Narayan’s argument that Indian nationalism ‘associated women with the preservation of Indian traditions, culture and spirituality’ (133) then it is possible to suggest that the sexual exploitation of indentured women was chosen as a central focus by nationalist patriarchies to emphasise the moral status of women associated with monogamous marriages and motherhood. Thus, as Indian women campaigned for the honour of their sisters in Fiji, they simultaneously ‘colluded in the patriarchal regulation of female sexuality’ (Welchman and Hossain xi). Of course, the counter-argument is that middle-class Indian women, who were economically privileged and had the leisure time to engage in such affairs, consciously employed patriarchal codes, for example, the honour/shame binary, to draw public attention to the exploitation of women labourers in Fiji, and in doing so, deconstructed patriarchal structures that oppressed other women. In this way, middle-class Indian women sometimes relied on acts of mimicry to camouflage their resistances.

In 1918, this internal bond of sisterhood among middle-class Indian women was extended to include Australian and New Zealand women. The Sydney Morning Herald draws attention to this point of collaboration: “There is in India an active and large society of high-class native women. Learning of conditions of the
Indian women in Fiji, but recognizing that they were handicapped geographically in any effective steps to improve matters for them, they appealed, and not in vain, to the women of Australia and New Zealand, because of their proximity to Fiji, to take up with the authorities the case of Indian women there (‘Indian Women, Social Conditions in Fiji’ 9). Their plea for assistance was accepted by Australian and New Zealand women who, after reading Andrews and Pearson’s report, were also anxious to conduct their own investigation into the matter of morality in Fiji. As a result of these collaborative efforts, the Committee of Inquiry was born.

Purity, Chastity and the Angel in the House

Organisations affiliated to the Committee of Inquiry with international links included the Australasian Board of Missions, the Young Women’s Christian Association and the Australasian League of Honour for Women and Girls. Some of the Australian-based organisations involved included the National Council of Women in states throughout Australia, the Church of England Mother’s Union, the Child Study Association, the London Missionary Society Women’s Auxiliary, the Women’s Christian Temperance Association, the Women’s Reform League, the Women’s Peace Army, the Association of Women Workers, the Baptist Women’s Missionary Association Auxiliary, the Church Missionary Society, the Methodist Mission Auxiliary, the Women’s Service Guild of Western Australia and the Society to Combat Social Evil (‘Indian Women, Social Conditions in Fiji’ 9). The only New Zealand association affiliated to the Committee of Inquiry was the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. On the whole, many of these organisations were driven by the need to help the enslaved or colonised ‘Other’. This imperialist agenda was strengthened by a Christian ethos of love and patriarchal constructions of femininity and female sexuality. Underlying this union between colonial, imperial, Christian and patriarchal ideologies are virtues of faith, hope, love, devotion, humility, chastity, purity and honour. For example, the Australasian Board of Missions, formed in Sydney in 1850, strove to convert indigenous Australians to the Anglican faith (Australian Women’s Register). Comparatively, the Australasian League of Honour for Women and Girls, an offshoot of the British League of Honour, was established in 1915 to promote the welfare and development of young women and girls. In their week of humiliation and prayer, members of the league were encouraged to strive for ‘a higher ideal and standard of purity in every department of life’ (‘Australasian League of Honour’ 3). The Women’s Christian Temperance Union reiterated a similar view of morality as it worked ‘for God, for home and for humanity’ (2). This Union was established in New Zealand in 1855 when Mrs. Leavitt arrived from the United States bearing with her a petition signed by women from all over the world to introduce the prohibition of alcohol because of its alleged effects.
on family life (Women’s Christian Temperance Movement 2). Even organisations with a broader social justice agenda like the National Council of Women stressed virtues of sympathy and humility in the 1900s.

Ideals of domesticity, honour and chastity, foundational to Australasian women’s transnational sisterhood, are perhaps best illustrated through the Victorian notion of the ‘Angel in the House’. This devoted, submissive wife was expected to be ‘passive and powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious and above all – pure’ (Stansell 466). She existed within the woman’s sphere where she was required to carry out all duties in the home as well as engage in religious and charitable activities. As organisations affiliated to the Committee of Inquiry set out to nurture the Angel in the House, they placed a significant emphasis on cultivating personal disposition and character. In fact, it can be said that they reiterated the Aristotelian view that ‘good and right behaviour emanates from within a person’ (Preston 45). The Committee’s quest to foster virtuous ideals involved combating social evil as well. For example, its members played an active role in the Women’s Convention on Social Evil, arranged by the Women’s Political Association on 6 May 1916 in Melbourne Australia. The convention met to oppose a State Health Bill to regulate prostitution. Its aim was to produce a ‘happy and truly moral community’ (Women’s Political Association).

Florence Garnham: Revisiting the Angel in the House

When the Committee of Inquiry was established in 1918, its first major undertaking was to dispatch Florence Garnham of the London Missionary Society in Calcutta to ‘study the conditions of Indian life from a moral standpoint’ (Garnham 4). Garnham, who was also a member of the committee, carried out investigations in Viti Levu from June 4 to August 26, 1918, and produced a thirty-page document titled: ‘A Report on the Social and Moral Conditions of Indians in Fiji’. The recommendations proposed in her report were relayed to the Governor of Fiji at the time, Sir Ernest Sweet-Escott, in a letter written by the President of the Committee, Winifred Scott Fletcher, on 3 April 1919. It stated: ‘The Committee of Inquiry into the social and moral conditions of Indian women in Fiji comprised of leading women’s Philanthropic Societies throughout Australasia earnestly and respectfully begs that the following reforms suggested in the Report of Miss Garnham shall receive the consideration of your government’ (‘Committee of Inquiry’ Letter). In response to this letter, the Governor appointed a Select Committee in 1919 to examine the report. The Select Committee described Garnham’s Report as ‘temperate and reasonable’ (Colonial Secretary’s Office, Minutes 2630/19) and proceeded to work with the Committee of Inquiry to implement some of the proposed recommendations.
Garnham’s Report was germinal because it functioned as an informal mandate for the Committee of Inquiry and some fourteen years were spent advancing the recommendations proposed in it through internal dialogues with the Colonial Government. On the one hand, Garnham echoed propositions made by Andrews and Pearson in 1916. Amongst these were suggestions to adjust the sex ratio, promote sanctity in marriages, foster purity in the home, and free women from plantation work so they could tend to duties in the domestic sphere and care for their children. The latter reinforces the separation of public and private spheres according to gendered norms. It emphasises that women should be relegated to the private or the woman’s sphere and excluded from the public sphere. Binary oppositions of honour/shame and chastity/prostitution also resurface as Garnham affirmed: ‘it was impossible for a woman to preserve her chastity in the coolie lines’ (6). While the Select Committee felt that little could be done to adjust the sex ratios, it supported Garnham’s recommendation to appoint women doctors and nurses and provide education for women and girls (Colonial Secretary’s Office, ‘The Select Committee Minutes’, MS No.1157/19). These proposed reforms to health and education were vital in narrowing the gap between Australasian women’s intentions to improve the lives of indentured women and the basic needs of this group of women in light of the realities of their lived experiences. When these trajectories converged, the Committee’s efforts begin to shift towards the second phase of women’s organisation.

Health Reforms and Women’s Empowerment (1918-1922)

International health reforms from the 1880s to the mid 1920s intersected with the broader objectives of the ‘purity movement’ or the ‘social purity crusade’ (Engs xv) which was largely concerned with advancing a ‘single-standard of sexuality’, sharing knowledge on child-rearing practices and promoting anti-prostitution (Engs xv). In this sense, religion was an underlying factor behind the intersection between women’s morality and health, particularly as it advanced aspects of social purity and cleanliness in relation to the female body. However, it is equally important to note that health is ‘one of the vital indicators reflecting quality of human life’ (National Human Rights Commission). My main argument here is that the provision of information on pre-natal and post-natal care, sexually transmitted diseases and family planning were vital to improving the quality of life for indentured women. Indentured women also affirmed the need for these vital services. Moreover, given that health rights are intricately related to other rights like food, housing, employment, education and so
forth, the Committee of Inquiry also contributed to the attainment of some of these rights as well. For instance, it played a critical role in pressurising the government and the community to educate Indian girls.

The health reforms proposed by Garnham were based on conversations held with indentured women and men in colonial Fiji. During these conversations, Garnham uncovered that in addition to the high costs incurred while in plantation hospitals (2/- a day), the male respondents she spoke to said that they objected to their women being treated by other men, particularly when they were not qualified doctors (Garnham 25). When these observations were relayed to the Committee of Inquiry, it proposed that member Dr. Kate Knowles formulate a request to the Fiji Government to urge for an improvement to medical facilities. Some of the recommendations included: the establishment of government dispensaries where Indians could receive free outpatient treatment, the employment of four Indian girls as obstetric pupils and the appointment of a female Junior Medical Officer (Legislative Council Paper No. 46). The Fiji Government approved these recommendations and invited the Committee to find an appropriate candidate for the position of Junior Medical Officer. The criteria it offered was that: ‘She should come from India or have had Indian experience’ (Legislative Council Paper No. 46). The Committee promptly utilised its transnational networks as it placed advertisements in medical journals throughout Australia, India and Great Britain. Care was taken to select a candidate who could withstand the working and living conditions in colonial Fiji and more importantly, who could speak Hindustani. After an extensive search, the Committee chose Dr. Mildred Staley, a graduate of London University and daughter of Reverend Thomas Staley. The Sydney Morning Herald stated that: ‘She was selected because of her extensive experience of life in India and her work throughout the war with the French Red Cross and the Serbian Army’ (‘Dr. Mildred Staley’ 7). Although Dr. Staley arrived in Fiji on January 1, 1921, one year after all remaining indentures were cancelled, the appalling conditions associated with indenture continued and so did the struggle for health reforms. From 1921-1922, Dr. Staley played a critical role in attending to Indian women’s health and reproductive rights and training Indian women as mid-wives.

When the Fiji Government announced that it was compelled to dispense of the services of Dr. Staley in 1922, it was indentured women in Fiji who first collectively and publically opposed this decision. They expressed alarm ‘at the prospect of losing the attentions of a doctor of their own sex’ (‘Women Petition Governor’ 14) and led a deputation to the Governor, Sir Cecil Rodwell. In a petition presented to the Governor, they stated that: ‘It was their prayer that the excellent provision for their medical needs might be continued and even increased’ (‘Women Petition Governor’ 14). What did this prayer mean to indentured women? In the context of indenture, the female body was often
physically and/or sexually violated by men in public and private spheres. These sorts of violations often resulted in humiliation, degradation and the culmination of feelings of insecurity and fear among women. Therefore, when Dr. Staley developed a bond of trust with indentured women, she created a safe space to care for the vulnerable female body. This bond was important because it directly intersected with the daily needs and rights of indentured women in Fiji. In this instance, class, ethnic and religious differences between indentured women workers and middle-class Australasian women did not act as barriers to their collective solidarity.

Not surprisingly, when the Fiji Government explained that Dr. Staley was retrenched due to ‘financial stringency’, Australasian women joined indentured women in their protests. The Sydney Morning Herald captures this global outcry by women: ‘Although occurring in a remote corner such as Fiji, it has become an international matter, for not only have the Australasian Committee cabled to the Fijian Government and Colonial Office, urging the continuance of this appointment on the grounds of its absolute necessity, but representations have been made to the Colonial Office’ (‘Women Petition Governor’ 4). Although this verdict was not retracted, the Committee of Inquiry continued to lobby for the health rights of indentured women until a decision was made to disband the committee in 1932. Other associations, such as the Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia under the supervision of Nurse Lawrence, were conducting excellent medical work in Fiji. The Committee of Inquiry acknowledged these efforts as it handed over its existing funds to this Society in 1932 to continue the work it had started in the area of women’s health in the 1920s (‘Indian Women: Committee Disbanded’ 3). By then, the basic foundation for women’s health rights had already been established.

### Recovering Women’s Lost Voices

Since the 1970s, feminist historians and ethnographers have embarked on an often converging journey to restore women to history and to ‘recover women’s lost voices’ (see Waaldijk and Visweswaran). This article has attempted to contribute to these fields of study by documenting the ‘humanitarian efforts’ (‘Indian Women, Social Conditions in Fiji’) of the Australasian Committee of Inquiry into the Social and Moral Conditions of Indentured Women in Fiji. While the article has been critical of the Committee’s efforts to transplant values that reinforced patriarchal morality as reflected in colonial, imperial and Indian nationalist discourses, it has simultaneously celebrated its struggle to improve the quality of life for indentured women in Fiji through health reforms. The point I wish to highlight here is that when the efforts of this transnational network of Australasian women directly intersected with the daily needs of indentured...
women and they acknowledged this, a critical transcultural exchange between women began in 1922. This dialogue was fueled by intersections with global, regional, and national networks and historical circumstances.

*Margaret Mishra received her PhD from Monash University in Melbourne and teaches ethics and governance at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. Her research interests currently focus on feminisms, indenture and ethics.*

**Works Cited**


Colonial Secretary’s Office. ‘Committee of Inquiry into the Social and Moral Conditions of Indian Women in Fiji.’ Suva: The National Archives, No. 2630; 1919.

Colonial Secretary’s Office. ‘The Select Committee. Minutes.’ Suva: The National Archives, No. 1157/19; 1920.

Colonial Secretary’s Office. ‘The Select Committee.’ Suva: The National Archives, No. 2352; 1920.


Committee of Inquiry. Letter to Governor of Fiji, Sir Ernest Sweet-Escott. 3 April 1919. Fiji National Archives.


‘Women’s Committee Disbanded.’ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 February 1922: 3.


Bread and Breath: Two Reflections on the Ethics of (Doing) History

Rachel Buchanan and Maria Tumarkin

Introduction: This article developed from the conversations we have had with each other about history. How do we make it? Why do we make it? Who is history for? The ‘bread’ in the title refers to blessed, complicated moments of challenge or revelation for each of us, difficult epiphanies in which we have had to reconsider the ethics of our research, the location of our sources (the archive or the body, the oral history interview or the song) and the multiple ways in which historical knowledge can be transmitted. The ‘breath’, in turn, speaks of human life, which, after all, is the basic, indivisible cell of any history; it speaks too of the precious, often intangible quality of the connections we make with the past.

Really, what we want to know is this—how does history make us, and what is at stake, for us, when we make history? This article is a dialogue in which we try to listen to each other and respond to the different moments we recount. Although our concerns are different—Rachel Buchanan argues it is not always ethical to collect oral histories but there are ethical concerns, too, when a historian feasts in the archives; while Maria Tumarkin considers whether the institutionalised ethics of historical research in academia can blind us to the deeper, more fundamental ethical demands of working with the past—both of us feel that, in essence, we are talking, and worrying, about the same things. Bread and breath. The mutual, life-giving dependence of the past and the present.

Is the question of ethics in scholarly research fetishised, its considerable prominence of late a fad? We don't think so. For some time now we have been listening to each other recount moments and encounters that had pushed us to the limits, made us ‘open to all the winds … [with] no shelter, no protection’ (Pinter 2005). And in all the talking and listening, determined not to look away from these moments and encounters, we have discovered, to our surprise, that it is the notion of sustenance that has asserted itself as a central ethical idea. The ‘bread’ in the title then refers to the meaning and uses of stories, memories and archives that, as historians, we seek to connect to, and to understand. And all that ‘bread’ evokes—the taking and the giving of it, the feeding and the going without—is a reminder, which both of us welcome, of just how high the stakes are when we engage with the past.
Rachel Buchanan: On 18 October 2009, a cold Sunday morning, my parents, my eldest daughter and I set off south from New Plymouth along the Surf Coast Highway on our way to Parihaka. On the 18th of every month, there’s a *hui* (meeting) at the Maori settlement to mark Te Whiti’s ra day. The tradition is long-standing, the date significant. It was chosen to commemorate the day, in March 1860, when British soldiers fired the first shot in the first Taranaki War at Waitara, a township north of Parihaka on the central West Coast of New Zealand’s North Island.

These meetings started in the late 1860s when the non-violent *pa* (village) was set up by political and spiritual leaders Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi as a place for what Te Whiti called ‘a different kind of peace, a fighting peace’ (Riseborough, *Resistance* 231). By the late 1870s these *hui* had grown into enormous meetings—political rallies, prayer services, history lessons, feasts—attended by up to 4000 Maori from all around New Zealand. Both leaders spoke but it was Te Whiti who had the talent as an orator. His voice was mesmerising, spellbinding and enchanting. He was handsome and urbane, a master of metaphor, a lover of architecture, a connoisseur of symbolic political action, a news junkie and a visionary town planner who in the late 1880s oversaw the construction of a reservoir and hydraulic dam, the building of roads and the installation of electric lights at the settlement (Scott 185-192). This reconstruction followed *te pahua* (the plunder), the Crown’s 1881 invasion and ransacking of Parihaka. On the morning of 5 November 1881, 945 volunteers and 644 Armed Constabulary marched into the *pa* and were greeted by singing children and women carrying warm bread baked for the soldiers. Many of the militia-men were military settlers from Melbourne, lured across the Tasman by the promise of soldier-settler farms on confiscated Maori land.

State Highway 45, the narrow road my dad was driving on, was built by armed constabulary in the 1870s as a precursor to the invasion of Parihaka. Were we invaders too? I was so terrified. I held my spiral-bound, typeset manuscript in my lap. It contained many errors. For instance, the name of the settlement—Parihaka—was spelt incorrectly on the top left margin of each page. I thought about who might receive the manuscript and what they might say about it. A warm reception was one option. A lukewarm one was another. So too was rebuke, rebuff or even eviction. Relatives have told me that Taranaki people sometimes threw stones at unwanted visitors. My first research visit to Parihaka was in 2002. I was a new PhD student and a new mother. The visit had not gone well. My eagerness, arrogance and naivety—as well as the divisive internal politics of the place—had culminated in a terrible argument with Parihaka historian Te Miringa Hohaia. I sketch a very edited version of this visit in the first chapter of my book (*Parihaka Album* 3-8).
The details of that exchange were no longer so sharp but the feelings it generated were. There was the cringing sense of failure and outrage, the anger, the hunt for people to blame and the selfish fear that I had totally stuffed up the chance of getting any help from people at Parihaka, especially from Te Miringa, a *kaumatua* (leader) who had lodged one of the first Treaty of Waitangi claims back in the 1970s and had also been an instigator of a landmark exhibition, *Parihaka: The Art of Passive Resistance*, at City Gallery, Wellington in 2000. Later, once I got back to Melbourne, there was the guilt at my own stupidity.

These unpleasant feelings washed through me as we drove along all these years later; the baby I had nursed on that first trip was now a fair, watchful eight-year-old, Lily Arapera. On top of these old feelings, or maybe beneath them like a concrete foundation, was the great, immovable slab of my ignorance. A PhD had done nothing to shift the slab. If anything, it had made it worse. I kept thinking about the huge concrete foundation of Te Raukura, all that now remains at Parihaka of Te Whiti’s once magnificent Victorian meeting house. In 1927 a journalist described it as ‘a decaying castle of charm’. In 1960 it burnt down, taking the life of caretaker George Te Kahui Pokai Aitua with it (Buchanan, *Parihaka Album* 148, 139).

What sort of a caretaker had I been of the story of Parihaka? Who did I think I was, taking a manuscript to this place, this pa, this living memorial to the ravages of war in Taranaki, this historic site, this refugee camp, this beautiful ruin? What would I say about my work to the audience here? Forget about the objective, distant, expert, academic, third-person narrator, forget about hiding behind theory, forget about showing off about how many books or archival documents I’d read. No one cared. None of that mattered. Actually, that’s not quite true. A mastery of theory did matter: as Nepia Mahuika has recently argued, excellence matters and breadth of engagement matters (24-40). But what mattered much more was my intentions, the context for my research and the usefulness of my research for this community in the present and into the future, all ethical questions raised by Linda Tuhikāi Smith in her seminal work, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (9-10). Smith’s book is written for indigenous researchers, ‘primarily to help ourselves’ (17). The trouble is that I am not an insider, an indigenous researcher in the Smith mould, but nor am I an outsider. I am someone in-between, someone raised in a mostly Pakeha world, someone who has had to work to reconnect with my relatives in *Te Ao Maori* (the Maori world) and to learn about *whakapapa* (genealogy), and then think about what kind of obligations my *whakapapa* might place on me as a researcher as well as what kind of privileges it might bring.

My publisher was Maori-owned and Maori-run. I was making this trip to Parihaka on the advice of a cousin, archivist and Taranaki reo (Taranaki Maori language) advocate Honiana Love. I had taken on Parihaka as a research topic
with every intention of being humble and writing and researching using the kaupapa Maori techniques Smith argues for in Decolonizing Methodologies. Yet my first research trip to Parihaka showed I had a long way to go. It is common, in New Zealand at least, to connect oral history with Maori history as if historical evidence exists, primarily, in the bodies and minds of indigenous people (rather than in archives) and this history then needs to be extracted through interviews or testimonies. The requirements of the Waitangi Tribunal, New Zealand’s commission of inquiry into contemporary and historic breaches of the 1840 Treaty signed between Maori chiefs and the Crown, and the work of eminent historians such as Judith Binney, reinforce this connection between oral history and Maori people.

In the 1990s, when the Tribunal sat at Parihaka, Maori were required to submit a ‘traditional history’ report with their claim. These reports had to detail genealogy, geography, customary practices, warfare, alliances, migrations and so on, both pre- and post-1840. In 1999, the tribunal’s chief historian, Dr Grant Phillipson, suggested claimants research these reports by interviewing kaumatua and kiaua (senior women) and consulting whakapapa books or other written sources in tribal possession. In a later article, Phillipson wrote: ‘There are many varieties of oral evidence, some of it presented by Crown eyewitnesses to historical events; but on the whole it is considered the domain of Maori claimants’ (‘Talking’ 42). This evidence could include oral traditions transmitted in the home or on the marae (meeting place) and ‘ceremonial songs and orations that illustrate a context or create powerful moods or impressions’ (‘Talking’ 41).

Likewise, Binney’s landmark scholarship, including her most recent book on Te Urewera, her work on Te Kooti, her journal articles and even her first book, Nga Morehu, all rely, to varying degrees, on Maori informants who correct, interpret or make meaning from written or visual records or from Maori oral sources, such as waiata (songs) or whakatauki (proverbs), that have been written down. The title of an important 1987 essay by Binney on her work with Maori at Maungapohatu in the Ureweras makes the point explicit: ‘Maori Oral Narratives, Pakeha Written Texts: Two Forms of Telling History’. In 1993, in a paper presented at Te Niho o Te Ati Awa, one of the three marae still functioning at Parihaka, historian Hazel Riseborough argued that ‘Pakeha sources’ were biased and could only tell a partial story about Parihaka. The full story, what Riseborough described as a ‘true picture’ could only be ‘painted by you, te iwi kainga [the people of Parihaka], from sources available only to you—your oral sources, especially your waiata’.

The work of Binney and Riseborough and the processes of the tribunal shaped my early research strategies: Maori stories in the flesh; Pakeha stories on the paper! Maori had memory; Pakeha had history! I had gained the necessary ethics clearance from Monash University and in 2002 assumed that I would
begin recruiting informants at Parihaka, descendants of people at the place during *te pahua*, people that could provide me with a ‘true picture’. I had interviewed hundreds of people as a newspaper journalist—mostly quick, off-the-cuff encounters, but also some very intense interactions lasting several days—but I was confident these ‘oral history’ interviews would be different, more ethical and meaningful (Mahar 3-8). But my argument with Te Miringa taught me a lesson or two. By 2008, when I had started to write my book, I understood that there was no ‘true picture’ of Parihaka. There was no definitive insider account. Every account, including mine, would be subject to debate and dispute. Parihaka was/is a prophetic community, so there is no conclusion to the story, no agreed resolution. It is open-ended and fluid.

This lesson came later though. The first thing the argument taught me was that I had no right to waltz into Parihaka and ask elderly strangers, many of whom were living in very basic housing, to tell me all about their pain and suffering. I quickly understood that if I wanted people to trust me and talk with me, I would have to be prepared to offer something in return. In short, I would need to move back to New Zealand, I would need to learn Maori and I would need to be prepared to put in a lot of unpaid work on the *marae*. I was unable to make these commitments but I did not want to give up on my research. So, from 2002 on, the challenge was to figure out how I could write a Maori and Pakeha history of Parihaka just the same. Eventually I came to understand that I could speak with Parihaka people, both living and dead, in the archives, especially in the anti-colonial archives created through the work of the Waitangi Tribunal and through Maori-led history-making in art galleries and museums. Te Miringa Hohaia was a major contributor in all these fields.

This was how I tried to be ethical. Although I stayed in touch with Te Miringa and sometimes sought his advice, I decided to ask for very little. Also, I decided to pursue, with determination, any of my family’s Maori connections with either Taranaki or Wellington, and see where this work took me. But still. I worried as we drove along. In 1999 Smith wrote of how indigenous communities and activists thought about research: ‘At a common sense level research was talked about in terms of its absolute worthlessness to us, the indigenous world, and its absolute usefulness to those who wielded it as an instrument’ (3). I had a book manuscript in my hand. I was almost an author. Obviously I had benefited from my research, but would any benefits flow the other way? Would I be just another person who was perceived as having done Parihaka over?

I recited my short *mihi* (talk) over and over in my head. I read and re-read my handwritten notes. I knew that if my chance came, and I was invited to speak inside *Te Pae Pae* (a meeting house), that I’d have to do it off the top of my head.
We turned off onto mid-Parihaka Road and soon we were at Te Whiti’s monument, right in front of the slab at Te Raukura. We were going to go on with dad’s friend Tony Ruakere and his wife Anne. Then Lindsay Rihari McLeod joined us. He had opened Parihaka’s evidence during the Waitangi Tribunal hearings in 1991 so he was one of the people I had spoken with in the archives. Our small group was called on first. Lindsay and my father spoke in Maori in the *powhiri* (welcome), then we walked around *Te Pae Pae* for the handshake, hongi and kiss. The atmosphere was generally warm but as I approached one kuia (female elder) I could hear her muttering: ‘As if that’s not enough, they have to take the bread from our mouths too…’.

I did get to speak and others responded, rebutting my arguments or putting their alternatives. At last I was getting a chance to defend my PhD, like they do in America! Eventually, the *kuia* got up. She repeated her comments about bread. ‘They have taken our land,’ she said slowly and forcefully, ‘and now they want to take the bread from our mouths too’. The woman was looking down her nose at me with a frown or a grimace or maybe it was an ironic smile.

Stories keep us alive. They sustain us. Bread and breath. How much of a difference is there, really, between these two words? Stories feed us. This statement is more than metaphor as a proverb, *ko te kai a te rangatira, he korero* (the food of chiefs is talk) attests (Tau 12). In the absence of material wealth—land, money or *taonga* such as feather cloaks or greenstone ornaments—stories are the most significant treasure that people at Parihaka have left to hand on to their descendants. Kuia Parekaitu Tito made this point, explicitly, in an interview recorded for the 2000 City Gallery show, *Parihaka: The Art of Passive Resistance*. ‘We haven’t got anything to offer them at the moment except *korero* (talk)’, Tito said (Hohaia 73-74).

That day at Parihaka, a different *kuia* had chosen her metaphor with care. Bread is an important part of the nineteenth-century Parihaka story but it is also part of much older Christian traditions too, in Bible stories about manna from heaven and loaves and fishes. The founders of Parihaka, Te Whiti and Tohu, were very familiar with the Bible. In about 1840, Te Whiti and Tohu had been baptised by Minarapa Te Rangihatuake, a freed Nga Puhi captive who built the first church in the Wellington region, the one near Te Aro pa in what is now central Wellington. The young leaders had returned to Taranaki with Te Rangihatuake in 1842 and they chose to attend the mission school that had been set up by Reformed Lutheran Missionary, Johann Freidrich Riemenschneider at Warea. There they learnt more about the Bible. They also learnt about European agriculture—the crops and the machinery. Together they built and managed a flour mill at Warea (Riseborough, ‘Resistance’ 231-32).
The ability to grow and harvest crops, to feed your own people but also to sell to white settlers, was crucial for Taranaki Maori as they (we) worked hard to resist the multiple pressures caused by war and by ballooning white settlement. In the wars of the 1860s, imperial troops had burnt villages and destroyed crops in north and south Taranaki. In the late 1870s, as the power and reputation of Parihaka grew, armed constabulary were again destroying Maori crops as they surveyed and then built the road to Parihaka. In early 1880, William Gordon sketched several mountains of bread piled on the floor and tables. ‘Bread for Parihaka meeting in Dining Room Opunake Hotel Jan 16 1880’, the caption says (Riseborough, ‘Resistance’ 240).

The men who invaded Parihaka in November 1881 were greeted by singing, dancing children and by women carrying ‘500 loaves they had made in the Parihaka bakery to feed their manuhiri, their visitors’ (‘Resistance’ 244). The bread was warm. Who can resist the smell of fresh homemade bread? Who can resist the lure of a good story? But are all stories ours for the taking? Can we, as historians and writers, simply help ourselves to whatever stories we like the smell and taste of?

I’m not so sure that we can. As Arinia Loader has recently observed in her essay on her koroua (male elder), Maori history is about two seemingly opposed things: it is personal and it is about relationships, but it is also about ‘casting the net wider’. Maori history is about whakapapa. Researchers need to take care to protect important relationships with the living and the dead. ‘Maori history has its own internal ethics and ethics committees residing within us’, Loader wrote (Loader 53).

After the kuia made her oblique comments about my work, the conversation inside Te Pae Pae moved on. A visitor was complimented on his beautiful Maori and there was a discussion about the Mongrel Mob’s recent visit to the pa. Then Te Miringa stood up. ‘I would like to say something else about Rachel’s book. This korero (talk) is not taking the bread from people’s mouths’, he said. ‘By sharing her korero she is putting the bread in people’s mouths’.

I was shocked, thrilled, humbled and nourished by this statement. I had been facing the ethics committee and the chairman had decided to give my work the seal of approval. Needless to say, at the hakari (feast) afterwards, I found that many people wanted to speak with me. Outsider no more, my education had begun. I sought Te Miringa’s guidance about my next research project and I had expected to enjoy many more challenging conversations with him, but this was not to be. On 17 August 2010, Te Miringa died, very unexpectedly, only 58 years old, an irreplaceable loss for everyone in Taranaki. His devastating death prompted me to share this story and to ask: If you are ‘taking the bread from people’s mouths’ in your research—and aren’t we all in some way—then
what kind of sustenance are you offering in return? Is your work a theft or an exchange? Does your work profit from the suffering of others or does it relieve suffering? Who are you feeding with your work and why? Are you prepared to listen to these questions?

A week after Te Miringa’s death I was in Aotearoa New Zealand to give a seminar at Victoria University’s Stout Research Centre for New Zealand Studies and I learned that Te Miringa had been using some of the ideas and arguments in my book as he and other Taranaki leaders prepared for the forthcoming Treaty of Waitangi claim settlement negotiations with the Crown. This article—and the other ones I’ve written since the book—has been peer-reviewed by whanaunga (relatives) in Taranaki. My work has a new, more intimate and demanding, ethics review panel. Meanwhile, in a long but mixed review of The Parihaka Album on Radio New Zealand’s Te Ahi Kaa program, Hiria Hammond and Maraea Rakuraku asked if my work was another example of outsiders telling Maori history. ‘Where are the Maori voices in this book?’ they wondered.

***

Maria Tumarkin: It seems that the deeper questions of ethics in academia have become so thoroughly bureaucratised that we are liable to be shocked by the idea that a historian could be seen as taking bread from people’s mouths: a good historian, mind you, the one who plays by the rules, the one who is vigilant about her sources, extra-careful with her claims, sensitive to cultural idioms and imbalances of power, not in pursuit of any agenda beyond that of historical truths as she sees them. And to imagine this model historian—someone like Rachel Buchanan, someone like a great many of us at pains to do the right thing—accused, even if by one woman, even if in a way that is later powerfully retracted, of acting unethically, of taking rather than giving, is a heartbreaking undertaking. Because, really, what more could be asked of us?

I suspect that a response of hurt puzzlement, however explicable, owes a great deal to the way in which ethical questions have been outsourced to university ethics committees, buried in consent forms and cross-cultural protocols, in rules—both litigiously-minded and often smacking of sophistry—for human research conduct, which ensure that these days we are too busy wrestling with our fifty-page ethics applications to wrestle properly with ourselves. Yet most things that can be captured preemptively in forms and guidelines refer only to the most superficial kinds of injuries that historical practice may inflict. The ethics committee faced by Rachel Buchanan (faced by many of us at some point) has different kinds of transgressions in mind—trafficking in other people’s stories, for instance, or the unexamined motives of practitioners, or the obsession with mining data or, often enough, that insidious habit of turning away from the real-life consequences of one’s research.
In some ways a modern researcher of the past is trained to be not unlike our deposed Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, who sincerely believed that the answer to every uncomfortable question, every personal failing and every ethical dilemma was simply to work harder. But what does working harder mean in the field of history? More often than not, it means gathering more empirical data (more interviews, more documents, more case-studies), drilling even more ferociously and single-mindedly into a particular historical moment or an archive. But why? Why should it strike us as self-evident that the more minute our knowledge of a particular historical context, the more honest and illuminating our insights about the past? Even if we know all there is to know about a particular moment or movement, does it automatically mean that the knowledge we have painstakingly gathered can and will put bread into a single person’s mouth? Which is to say, will this knowledge repair or comfort, will it bring families together, can it cut through shame, can it make revisionism and falsification of the past harder to carry out with impunity?

Fetishised, the process of data extraction and accumulation (no matter how fluid and accommodating our notion of what constitutes this data) can easily blind us to the bigger questions of historical ethics and purpose—what do we believe the past actually does, what it is that we are doing when we engage with it, for what reason do we call out to the past, in whose name, what do we hope for, what do we stand to lose if the contact between the past and the present is momentarily or irretrievably broken?

When historians are encouraged to think of themselves as hunter-gatherers of sorts, what we get is the rise of Historian as a Debunker, a professional finger-pointer, a vigilante of sorts. This kind of a Historian (by no means a rare breed these days) uses her research to demonstrate that previous interpretations and definitive narratives of particular historical events fall apart in a more or less spectacular fashion under her extensive and enlightened scrutiny. Surely the culture of learned debunking, widely—and puzzlingly—accepted in the historical research, needs to be questioned at some length, not least for the kind of predatory instincts it implicitly encourages in those of us who do business with the past in relation to fellow practitioners and to the past itself.

There is another model too for the taking, Historian as a Disciplinarian, strict but fair, hard at work disciplining memory—giving detention to misbehaving memories caught playing up, keeping order in the noisy and uncouth pandemonium of competing narratives and interpretations. Just like the view of the Historian as Debunker, the Historian as a Disciplinarian provides yet another persuasive template of historical research, in which the deeper questions of ethics are side-stepped. In the end, both models misrecognise something fundamental about the nature of our responsibility to the past—the
responsibility that goes well beyond diligent record-keeping, well beyond the best reflection and analysis we are capable of and right towards the maintenance of ‘the bonds of mutual life-giving’ between the past and the present (Rose).

In my childhood my grandmother on my father’s side used to collect any stray bread crumbs her eyes could see. She would pick crumbs with her index or middle finger, finding them in all kinds of places—her plate or my plate, a kitchen table or a floor—and put them individually in her mouth. I grew up thinking most uncharitably of the intensity that surrounded my grandmother’s relationship with bread. To me it was an unseemly obsession, creepy and annoying. Only years later, already in Australia and with my grandmother no longer alive, I understood her fixation on bread crumbs as a legacy of my grandmother’s surviving the Holodomor—the Ukrainian famine of the 1930s, which, having claimed millions of lives, remained an unmentionable event for most of my grandmother’s life.

I recognise now that my grandmother’s handling of each crumb individually, the way bread called out to her, the pointillistic quality of the attention she lavished on it, was precisely how she carried the history and memory of her survival. She did so against the thick public silence, in which the history of the famine artificially engineered by Stalin, determinedly and vastly murderous in its intent, was buried. The memory of the famine lived in her body, first and foremost, in those fingers that reached out to every lost crumb so as to reclaim it and bring it back home, but it was also there in a myriad of inter-personal spaces and moments of contact, invisible to those (like me) who didn’t know what my grandmother knew about the absolute irreplaceability of each crumb.

For me, who had no awareness of Holodomor for all the time that I lived in the same city as my grandmother, for all the time that we ate bread together, the realisation that I carried a kind of encoded memory of my grandmother’s past and that this encoded memory was preserved (without being decoded or understood for decades) in a larger mnemonic archive of my childhood was a real moment of awakening. So much of the past is not always (or ever) ready to be seen or narrated, so much of the past does not even look like the past. It is passed on across generations not merely as stories or artifacts infused with tellable and extractable meanings, but as what Eva Hoffman called ‘emanations’ that are always on the verge of ‘erupting in flashes of imagery’ (Hoffman 9).

There has been quite a pronounced tendency automatically to think of this kind of past as traumatic because of how deeply it seems to be lodged inside us, how unpredictable and explosive its external manifestations sometimes are, but I think we should resist this tendency. Gabriele Schwab, for instance, draws on Derrida’s notion of crytonymy to suggest that the ‘creation of cryptic enclaves in language marks the traces of refused mourning’ (Schwab 4). My grandmother’s
secret and her inability to mourn has been, in other words, passed on to me through her silences and the way her silences were filled with crumbs of bread. ‘Live burials of sorts, these crypts in the psyche and in language contain the secrets of violent histories, the losses, violations, and atrocities that must be denied’ (4) and it is the descendants of survivors who live with and within these crypts. ‘The traces this endocryptic identification leaves in language’, Schwab concludes, ‘can only be deciphered, de-crypted in a symptomatic reading, mindful of a secret in language’ (4).

To decipher, to remember my grandmother’s fingers anew with deep, piercing sadness instead of a fickle irritation, to remember them with love rather than with the blind denial of my grandmother’s history, is finally to mourn what she could never mourn. Yes, that’s true, but I don’t think this is the whole story. I don’t think we should be so reliant on the notion of ‘trauma’ to be able to conceive of the kind of past that refuses to be neatly channeled into delimited and definable texts, artifacts, rituals, representations and legacies. Our tendency to think with trauma obscures just how many of our personal and shared histories behave precisely in this manner, how many of them we carry in our bodies as a kind of an internal flora or a stomach lining perhaps, how many of these stories are kept alive, if not fully or at all knowable, in our daily acts and relationships, the extent to which the familial or communal structures of reciprocity and hostility are created and sustained by these very histories. In the end, the past that sits on the tip of people’s tongues ready to be turned into a story, the past coooned in archives and photo albums ready to be seen, the past that gets a ritualised airing once a year at an anniversary or a commemoration ready to be paraded around, in other words, the kind of the past that is always ready to manifest itself as the past, is only the starting point for writing history.

* * *

Rachel Buchanan: Maria Tumarkin’s story about her grandmother’s obsession with crumbs invites us to think differently about where we get our information from and about where information might be stored and about how we, as researchers interested in the past, might access this information. This is especially critical for researchers working on the past in totalitarian regimes where many records have either been falsified or destroyed. Maria Tumarkin demonstrates that one way to get around this destruction or repression is to broaden the archive. She has described, so movingly, how her grandmother’s annoying and embarrassing habit of picking up crumbs was actually a historical re-enactment, a performance in memory of famine. Is it possible to think of her grandmother as an archive—not as someone whose memories can be extracted by a skilful oral history interviewer—but as something more than that, as someone whose actions, inactions, words, silences, appearances and choices are all records worthy of examination?
I think my grandmother Rawinia Queenie Agnes Buchanan’s life (especially her obsessions with manners, appearances and secret property acquisition) can be read as evidence of the destructive power of assimilationist policies in New Zealand, of the power of blood quantum laws to shape identities, of the double-sided shame associated with being Maori or not being Maori enough (Buchanan, *Parihaka Album*, 203-234). Like Maria, I have used this very small story (about my grandmother’s obsession with appearances, for example) to talk about some very big stories (colonisation, assimilation, indigenous resistance). It is exciting to switch modes and to try out the idea that rather than seeking to examine many archival collections and touch many thousands bits of old paper, rather than trying to be ever more disciplined through exhaustive archival one-upmanship—mine was bigger than yours, more remote, harder to translate, more chaotic, never before discovered, not even catalogued or I created my own archive by doing so many dozens of interviews—you might decide, eventually, to scale things back a bit and consider one piece of evidence only. A grandmother, say. Or, a week’s worth of entries in a diary (Nugent). A few years ago I heard the brilliant Dutch archivist Eric Ketlaar sum up a two-day conference on minority voices in the archives. He advised speakers against moving on to a new topic. Instead, he said, we should re-examine our papers, refine them and focus more tightly on just one aspect of our pet archives.

It is archivists, of course, who provide historians with our ‘bread and butter’—the diverse, precious collections we work with. To make ethical history, we need to be as self-conscious as Maria Tumarkin is about the limitations (and possibilities) of the evidence we are working with. We also need to think about the role of archivists as ‘secret historians’, as the first authors of the histories we make. My experience researching Parihaka taught me that Maori in Taranaki have made strategic decisions to present testimony at commissions of inquiry so that their (our) histories would be on the public record too. As Australian archivist and historian Joanna Sassoon has argued, ‘It is incumbent on historians to search for analytical tools to explore the symbiotic relationship between archival memory and the craft of history’ (‘Phantoms of Remembrance’ 40). Further, Sassoon wants to challenge the idea that ‘the discovery of new information and new evidence is a prerequisite for writing history. Sometimes the absence of direct evidence can lead to more imaginative uses of historical sources, and has the potential to lead to new kinds of histories’ (‘Chasing Phantoms’ 116), such as the ones written by Maria Tumarkin.

It is sobering to remember that archives contain no more than the crumbs of the past anyhow. As Terry Cook notes, state archives around the world select ‘for long-term preservation as society’s memory roughly 1-5 per cent of the
total documentation of major institutions and considerably less from private citizens’ (Cook 169). Given this, writers needed to work on better integrating the archivist (the subject) with the records (the object) (Cook 179).

Ideally, this knowledge should force us to move beyond an obsession with archives as the seat of empirical, objective, scientific and absolute truth—an obsession that has fuelled the so-called history wars in Australia—to a more sophisticated and interesting position in which our history-making also carefully considers what Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg have called ‘the task of appraisal, acquisition, classification and description’ (851). Ideally, such knowledge should force us to broaden, quite radically, what might be considered evidence to include, for example, grandmothers and their annoying little habits.

Derrida’s exciting 1996 speech, ‘Archive Fever’, invites even those researchers who work exclusively in conventional, state-run archives, to acknowledge that what they are doing involves intuition and creativity as well as logic and analysis. In their introduction to ‘Archives and Archiving’, Part I of the collection of papers produced by the Sawyer Seminar on archives, Blouin and Rosenberg argued that participants had two responses to Derrida’s intervention and the subsequent ‘archival turn’ in humanities research. One participant, Carolyn Steedman, asserted that the value of Derrida’s intervention was ‘in its turn to the historical subjective, the realm of emotions, feelings, and experiences that clearly affect the ways both individual and social pasts and presents are understood but whose access lies elsewhere than in the archive’ (1).

However, Steedman argued that archives were not like human memory and that there was actually not that much there in the archives, that the bundles of material they contained were benign and lifeless, sitting there waiting to be narrativized by ‘the historian, the user, the social rememberer [who] gives the archives its meaning’ (1).

But others disputed this view. Ketlaar has described archives not as ‘dead masses of paper but living matter, intervening, directly, in the lives of hundreds of thousands of people’ (17), while archival ethnographer Laura Ann Stoler says archives have a ‘pulse’ (52). The archivists who presented at the Sawyer seminar went further. In the introduction to Part II, Blouin and Rosenberg said participants described archiving as far more than the preservation of knowledge. They said an understanding of the past was being shaped ‘by direct and indirect intervention and mediations by archivists at all levels’. (86). Some even said the present moment was a ‘very active phase in archival intervention, one that can be described as beyond postcustodial, in which the processes of selection, access and even description are increasingly structured by particular cultural values, social biases and political inclinations’ (86, emphasis in original). Of course, the creation of archives—via selection, access and description—has always been
shaped by cultural, political and individual biases. What is different now is that institutions and their staff are, ideally, aware of these biases and working to create holistic, challenging collections that document many perspectives, even unpalatable or unpopular ones, on a particular event. The National Library’s Forgotten Australians Project is an exemplar of what has been described as archival ‘memory activism’ (Sassoon, ‘Memory for justice’ 25).

Archives grow through selection, rejection, exclusion and destruction. The remembering of the archive is built on a much larger process of forgetting. Writing about archiving and architecture, Kent Kleinman said: ‘The archive is more accurately described as a machine for forgetting’ (55).

Ethical practice should be a concern and challenge for all researchers, not just those of us writing about our families or about marginalized, colonized or abused groups of people. Every source we work with, living and dead, visible and invisible, relative or foreign, has a pulse. If we want our work to be fresh rather than stale, then we need to respect this.

***

Maria Tumarkin: In ‘order to be knowingly in each others’ presence’, writes one of the foremost cultural anthropologists of our time, Johannes Fabian,

we must somehow share each others’ past. To put this provocatively, I am convinced that only when they get to a point where they begin to ‘remember the present’ will self and other be drawn into a process of mutual recognition based on the kind of knowledge that changes the knower and that by the same token reconstitutes his or her identity. (68)

Most of our historical projects do not change us or, at the very least, they do not change us enough, not least because they tend to the past, which is extractable and extrapolateable, explicit, rather than implicit, discrete rather than diffused. These kinds of projects are, of course, much easier to undertake, but it doesn’t mean that we need to settle for them or for the implicit boundaries that they propose about what it is that we are meant to be interested in as historians. How much more interesting it would be to try to connect to—and to write about—the past that is lodged deeply within bodies, families and communities, the past that is the bread in people’s mouths, that is the silently collected crumbs under their fingertips. I read and re-read Deborah Rose’s words:

Our boundaries around what is sayable, and our elisions that treat as real only that which can be subject to constricted modes of social analysis, have the potential either to either excise a great range of experience and knowledge, or to drag it back into the familiar, thus depriving it of its own real power. (97)
As people who think with and about the past, we have responsibility to that power. To honour it we must produce the kind of work that acknowledges in its every breath the fact that the webs of connectivity and kinships produced by the past—the hauntings, the forces and the archives of all kinds—are real things that exist in the real world and continue to affect real people.

In a review of Clifford Geertz’s posthumous collection of essays in *The Australian*, historian Inga Clendinnen wrote that Geertz’s work was revelatory: it married ‘intense intellectual inquiry to exhilaration’. For any intellectual work to be revelatory (and why shouldn’t we aim for that as opposed to something that is the academic equivalent of meat and two veg—*scholarly rigour*), it needs to leave space for its author herself to experience revelations. For any work to be exhilarating, it needs to be exhilarating—not always but sometimes—to write. This exhilaration can of course come from different places; in my case it was the realisation—the one I share with Rachel Buchanan and the one that has compelled us towards this collaboration—that the search for a historical truth is always at the same time the search for a personal truth as well.

When I was writing my first book, I was resistant for a long time to putting myself into the story. I was taught, after all, that real historians never cry or laugh in their work, that their identity and the personal stakes they may have in their work should, for the most part, be covered up in the interest of good history and good taste. I was taught that you take the all-important energy from the historical material by putting too much of yourself in. What I discovered was that I could not communicate the essence of my ideas and insights (this book explored the fate and power of physical sites of trauma across the world), that I could not do justice to the subject matter without making explicit what was at stake for me. Instead of hiding from my readers, I found it essential—and exhilarating—to stand in their full view.

I still remember the first academic book that made me cry—Avery Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters*. What a relief it was to be so deeply and personally affected by a book of scholarship and to realise that you can, in fact, produce a work of great intellectual weight and startling originality, meticulously researched, rich in sources and theoretical apparatus, but also with its author powerfully present on its pages—emotional, vulnerable, deeply and obviously affected by her research and ideas. *Revelatory, exhilarating, transformative*—we rarely hear these words in History Departments, but why not? Why shouldn’t we want our research and writing to be described in those terms? Why shouldn’t our identity as practitioners of history in its aspirational form, when we lie on our beds, when we imagine our future, when we throw ourselves into our research, be directly connected to words just like that? As readers, these are the kinds of history we want to read, so why don’t we want to write them? We are offered many possible identity templates as historians: we can be glorified bureaucrats,
debunkers, disciplinarians or hunter-gatherers. Yet none of these possibilities feel even remotely appealing to me. Certainly none rings true. But should we choose to go back to the story at the heart of this essay, to the question that this story asks of us, which is both confronting and deeply liberating—Who and what are we feeding with our work and why?—then I think we can begin imagining the kind of history writing that might, over time, end up putting bread (one crumb at a time) back into people’s mouths.

Rachel Buchanan (Taranaki, Te Ati Awa, Ngati Ruanui) is an honorary resident scholar at Victoria University, Wellington’s Stout Research Centre

Maria Tumarkin is a Melbourne-based writer and cultural historian.

Works Cited


—. ‘“Memory for justice” or “Justice for memories”: Remembering forgotten Australians and former child migrants.’ _Archifacts_ (2010): 25-34.


A spectre is haunting Fiji—the spectre of indenture.¹ One ghost in particular, the figure of Totaram Sanadhya, stands out from the other ghostly presences, sometimes as a person, Totaram, sometimes as an author, Sanadhya. How shall we read him? How shall we summon him, and how shall we address him (by first name, by authorial surname, or with an honorific suffix, -ji, or sir perhaps?); in the process, how shall we address his legacy? For his words are now, more than ever, being studied. Strangest of all, in their carefully worded introduction to their translation of his My Twenty-One Years in the Fiji Islands and the Story of the Haunted Line, John Kelly and Uttra Singh remark that this book was ‘not written for us’ (7), and that if we read it the way we read other histories ‘we will sometimes be dramatically misled’ (7). Historians, they remark, all ‘have the same audience in mind’, which is to say, an audience of the future, ‘not just their contemporaries, but also future generations’ (8). Sanadhya produced ‘passionate writing’ demanding ‘immediate action’ (9). The time for that immediate action, it seems, is still with us, but even action itself does not exhaust the significance of the haunting.

Perhaps, if we consult the ghost himself, it may be that Kelly and Singh are right in terms of Sanadhya’s purposiveness and intent. Yet history (the labours of many) has surrendered his text to us, delivered it to us, and it is now part of a tradition in the most literal sense of that word. To be sure, part of our interest has to be in the fact that the text did, in its time, generate an impact, and did produce change. Yet—to use Walter Ong’s evocative term that he uses to describe the nature of speech—this text which Kelly and Singh imagine as evanescent has not evaporated like morning dew. Rather, it has lingered, and has generated rich responses in ways that suggest that it lingers still. The text lingers not as a literary masterpiece (though the style of the text and its storytelling does bear considerable scrutiny), but as part of a wider scene, perhaps as a synecdoche of a dimension of that scene. As for the edition of the book that Kelly and Singh say ‘you hold in your hands’ (direct second person present prose) (1), it came out not in 1914, when the original versions were published in many languages (not English) in colonial India and the place Sanadhya returned to as his home, but in 1991, at the end of its own journey back to its own

¹ ‘A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcize this spectre: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French radicals and German police spies’ Marx and Engels (67).
home, the one whence it had come, a re-return. There it appeared in English translation. It remains in print to this day, not as a popular book, perhaps, but courtesy of the Fiji Museum which published it, and which distributes it still.

Evanescent even so. Surely this is the most fragile of documents, something dashed off to create an effect, something that has been retrieved because there is something of ongoing value in it to a later audience. But what? And why? In my inquiry into this most poignant of historical fragments, I am even more interested in the act of retrieval than I am in the original text per se. The retrieval began before it appeared in English, long before. A signal creative retrieval occurred in Subramani’s short story masterpiece, ‘Tell Me Where the Train Goes’ (1987), a story so harrowing it would be tempting to attribute the cause of Sanadhya’s renown today to it alone were it not for the fact that his account has been analysed in other disciplinary frameworks, notably historical, as well.

A strangely lingering evanescence, all the same. In framing my inquiry into this document’s survival, I am guided by a theoretical fragment of another kind—the life-work-death of the philosopher, Jacques Derrida. Just as I am looking at the join between a document and texts that followed it with Totaram, so am I looking at a late interview with Jacques Derrida and some of its joins. It is launched by a sentence which is hoicked out of a book that preceded it by many years, Spectres de Marx; that book in turn is joined to an imagined life and oeuvre, not to mention something we think we understand called deconstruction. It is customary to talk of these things being ‘folded’ into one another, but it is perhaps more accurate to think of them as bits of bigger things that, often unmanageably, are attached to contexts that prove inescapable, and I suggest, unpredictable.

There is value, then, in looking at this process of hoicking and snagging of fragments, of being caught by them, of leaving bits of ourselves behind, unfinished. It applies both to Sanadhya and to the way I seek to frame this. Jean Birnbaum launches his interview with Derrida by referring to Spectres de Marx directly:

Let’s return then, to Spectres de Marx. … Essential work, a stepping-stone book, entirely consecrated to the question of a justice to come and which opens with this enigmatic exorde: ‘Someone, you or me, comes forth and says, “I would like to learn, finally, to live”’. More than ten years after, where are you up to today with that, especially in relation to this desire to “know how to live”? (Derrida, ‘Je suis en guerre’; cf. Spectres 13)

In disturbingly clear reflections entirely consistent with the abstract writing/speech work in De la Grammatologie, and his more playful works on Freud,
Derrida replies at first in a literal way (that ‘idea came to me once the book was finished’), an evocative way (the phrase, he explains, evokes, when uttered with the right ‘menacing tone’ that ‘you’d better shape up and get your act together!’), and then,

Ok, right, to reply, me, without dodging your question: no, I have never learnt how to live. Indeed, no, not at all! To learn to live, that would mean knowing how to die … since Plato, it’s the old philosophical injunction: to philosophise, it’s to learn to die. I believe this truth without being able to enact it. Less and less. I have never learnt to accept it, death. (Derrida, ‘Je suis en guerre’)

Then, to these remarkable comments, he adds this which, in my view, has special force for any reflection on fragility: ‘we are all surviving in reprieve [sursis]’. To be in reprieve in this sense means that our sentences are suspended. The French words reinforce each other (survivant/sursis) and this is hardly coincidental—our sentence of sentience is carried out, and carries on—for now. In the case of Totaram Sanadhya’s text, it is remarkable that the text not only came to exist at all, but that it exists still. Derrida’s comment therefore is not just about personal survival (though given the fact he was on point of death it was about that too), but also, as the rest of his sentence makes plain, it concerns the injustice he sought to explore in Spectres de Marx, an injustice he felt to be ongoing, even worsening.

The spirits of indenture, in a Fijian context, at once seem to need summoning and exorcising, and that this be done with an appropriate sense of dignity and justice. In Spectres de Marx, Derrida writes evocatively of a twisted knot of meaning associated with conjuration (conjuration) and conjurement (conjuring). Noting that in the context of the 1990s New World Order there was an attempt to summon up and to exorcise Marx once and for all from the universe, he goes on to propose a hauntology which would analyse spirits (be they the ones Marx evoked in his Communist Manifesto—or his own as it was summoned). Derrida notes that within la conjuration there is both summoning (as of ghosts) and an act of exorcising. Then, he remarks

In the two concepts of conjuration (conjuration and conjurement, Verschwörung and Beschwörung), we ought to take account of another essential meaning. This is the act which consists of swearing, of taking an oath, thus of promising to decide, a taking of responsibility, in short to engage in a performative fashion. (89)

2 Earlier too he evokes the English word with its extra notion of conspiratorial oath-giving and solemnizing (73).
If writers summon up dead Totaram (who in his turn summons up the memory of the dead Fijians), they do so to render public, and to re-effect a kind of remembering. They also do so, as Derrida says, to try to create an ongoing momentum for change, to do something. Derrida writes that a ‘hantologie’ (hauntology) is needed to describe what ‘renders possible’ our ontologies and theologies, whether these be ‘positive or negative’ (89).

Writing in the Derridean sense does not just refer to written words, but rather to rupturing force of cultural transaction. It includes built structures, such as the very ‘line’ that Sanadhya describes. His account makes us reflect on what divides this kind of remembrance from publicly accepted, or even required, remembrance and memorializing. In my view, there is a world of difference between the formal acts of remembrance of war memorials (or even, in Fiji, as in London, of a living ceremonial guard outside a public building) on the one hand, and the attempt to reconstitute fragmentary threads like these by artists today. In words that apply as well to the grim, albeit mouldy, reminders of colonial Fiji, as to the Perth monuments the authors critiqued, we can freely agree with Fiske et al. when they write that

The word ‘monument’ comes from a Latin word meaning to warn or to advise. Monuments exist to give lessons from the past to the present. Normally they are oppressive, threatening messages, death speaking to life. (137)

Death speaking to life: the ‘art’ seeks to impress living youth with the solemn menace of the past. Those who subscribe to its values endorse thereby a series of traditions that are as problematic in Fiji (from the Arya Samaj through the historical Great Council of Chiefs, the old Parliament buildings, all the way to the desire to be in the Commonwealth) as they are in Australia (with its Anzac marches and monuments, and War Memorials, such as the one in Perth described in Myths of Oz).

But writing of the Derridean kind also includes the remembrance that Sanadhya himself embarked upon—and the furore it generated then, and since. In the Judaeo-Christian imaginings of ghosts, much attention is paid to the possibility that the spirit is trapped in between worlds because of an injustice done. It is unable to move on until the injustice is addressed. Until then, it comes back

---

3 We are reminded, like Jameson, of Marx too. Jameson writes in an extremely interesting way, taking account of the gap between the social meaning of a genre and its class-function in his analysis of the class-bounded ‘meanings’ of ghost stories—and he writes with awareness (at the outset of the book) of the gap between the social paraphrase of an aesthetic text and its aesthetics, in a way akin to my own rendering of Sanadhya’s story-telling. More narrowly, in a direct link to what we are discussing here, he says ghost stories suggest ‘a possession by History—“le mort saisit le vif!”’ to quote one of Marx’s favourite sayings—which can stretch all the way back to pre-capitalism and the feudal aristocracy’ (303). The dead hold the living in their grasp. And so they do.
over and over again (hence the apt word, revenant, French for a spirit, but also for returning). Attached and yet detached, physically immaterial and yet with material effects, the revenant comes back until the scene is repaired.

The writing in this sense is psychical in its force. Sanadhya’s prose matters as a Derridean kind of via rupta (and the second noun evokes one who violates a treaty), the kind of contract or girmit that is breached even as it is proffered for signature. The breach of faith that happened in so many small ways that it creates a kind of cultural formation is itself part of the scene of writing:

We ought to examine … writing as ‘breaching’—the psychical repetition of this previously neurological notion: opening up of its own space, effraction, breaking of a path against resistances, rupture and irruption becoming a route (rupta, via rupta), violent inscription. (Writing and Difference 214)

The breaching of faith, the breaching of the contract: these things are also part of the rage, and a part of the writing. If we loosely refer to such things as ‘context’ as if this word would somehow, magically, frame away the dangers of missing something important, then almost the entire point we need now to grasp about this text—its remembrance today—is lost.

**Totaram Sanadhya’s Text**

Sanadhya was a fine storyteller, and that surely helped. In *My Twenty-One Years in the Fiji Islands*, he does present facts and horrible and vivid information, but more often, he tells the story of a people not through catalogues of facts, but through stories like this one:

Sometimes the hunger goddess would lose the battle with me. One day I said to the manager that I should be given more supplies. The manager asked, ‘Well are you a man or a horse?’ I answered ‘I used to be a man but this hoe has made me into a horse. This hoe has awakened my hunger goddess’. (92)

The comic aspect of the writing lends it affective force, but this is a story about food and survival. Like many with a comic gift, Sanadhya wrote with a sense of outrage, and a strong sense of injustice. He wrote these stories to let people in India know what was happening to those who had signed the indenture agreement to travel to Fiji.

He wrote on a range of topics. From the fact that those returning did not acquire great wealth to the mistreatment of workers, his book was an exposé designed to shock the Indian administration into putting a stop to indenture. The topics
are diverse but a persistent target he attacks can be summed up in a word—exploitation. The book also includes a separate piece, titled ‘The Haunted Line’. The ‘line’ refers not to a line of people, but to a line of buildings. This is his story of the ‘Coolies’ being forced to live in the lines of accommodation for indentured labourers where once indigenous Fijians had been forced to live—and die. For them, the lines were already haunted. The haunting is again not just a spectacle of the deaths of those before, although it is that too, but also, of a rotten place to live:

I strolled around and saw the haunted lines from all sides. There were twenty-four rooms in it, and on all four sides was tall grass. … A little distance from the line in one direction was a very large sugar mill, and our ears would go numb from the sound of its engines. At three chains distance a river flowed. A bad smell was coming from the direction of the line, because there were so many rats inside the rooms. (134)

Sanadhya was not just a visitor; he was an inmate. The disgusting conditions that he faced were matched by the terrors some had of the place. The fact that Sanadhya was able to survive there led, as he wryly points out, to his workmates thinking he himself had special spiritual powers, and them sending their sick children to him to be healed (136). The story of the haunted lines, and indeed the stories more generally, continue to make their presence felt in modern work, as we shall soon see. Yet the question of legacy and of haunting—as kinds of conceptions of history perhaps—appear to have special purchase when wholesale suffering, death, and injustice appear to weigh, unassuaged, on the present.

We are now in a position to see that one story has had a greater effect than all the others, especially in the last three decades. No story Sanadhyan told has haunted the present more than his account of the case of Kunti. In his account, Kunti is a woman of twenty, with a husband. In 1912, at Sabukere, two men, a sirdar and an overseer, having cut her off from others, tried to rape her, but she ‘freed her arm, ran and jumped into the nearby river’ (48). On being rescued, she complained to no avail to the owner of the banana plantation. Not only was she not protected (or the perpetrators brought to justice), but worse, her husband was beaten, and she herself was subsequently threatened by an immigration officer (48). Notes added to the English edition of the book point out that Kunti’s was not an isolated story, but rather, a commonplace, with the

---

4 Mishra pluralizes the title of his essay so that it says ‘haunted lines’ (rather than the story of the haunted line, as in Sanadhya’s original text) making thereby the subtle point that not only is the line of buildings haunted, but so too is the writing about it.
women sometimes victims, sometimes complicit (166-72). In the retrieval of this story, the ambivalence itself is also presented—and it is to these accounts that I now turn.

Kunti’s Cry

Kunti’s story continues to haunt accounts of Fijian writing, be they critical or creative. While it is difficult to know when the modern revivification of this story begins, perhaps Mishra’s situation of it in Brij Lal’s work is most apt (Mishra, ‘Concerning an Axiom’). There are other ways of conceiving the starting point though. We could, for instance, validly begin with Walter Gill’s strange mix of memory and history in his personalized *Turn North-East at the Tombstone*. This vivid, yet colonial-mentality, book describes Gill’s mixed feelings (and roles) in relation to the indentured lines. While a participant in the oppression, in Conradesque fashion, he writes

Thanks to my senior’s system of remote control—working the estate entirely through the Tamil Sirdar—I was ignorant of growing labour unrest. There were many factors underlying the cause; the company policy of starvation wages; too many men to too few women; the iniquitous laws of the indenture system, and the generally harsh, almost inhuman treatment. (34)

He describes also the physical terms of the exchange in visceral terms: the woman whose foot is crushed beneath a train (27-28), the ‘body, naked and rightfully mutilated’ found ‘in a bamboo clump’ of one who had been killed by ‘five naked Pathans’ (30), and the white overseer who, killing a dog on the lines, having thrown the body into one of the huts is himself decapitated by its inhabitant—a Muslim offended by the unintended insult (30). Of all the stories, though, the one that has most relevance to the ghost that is most evoked is his passing reference to the ‘predicament of the Rarawai overseer who was ... caught off guard by some thirty women ... held on the ground while they took turns urinating on him’ (30). This story establishes his own tale of a near-miss of the same kind for him—in his tale, ‘The Randi-Wallah Learns’ (33-45). Gill’s version of things is interesting for providing a three dimensionally frank version of life in indenture, one that is for the most part entirely consistent with Sanadhya’s rendering, and yet one which is written from a colonial, and indeed casually colonizing, point of view.

As vivid as Gill’s memories are, it is Kunti’s story that is summoned back, albeit against something of the backdrop Gill himself depicts. Lal wrote before

---

5 Lal’s original essay was published in 1985.
Subramani published his story, and it is reasonable to view Lal’s essay as the key context against which to read Subramani’s great story. Lal wrote as a historian, and his selection of this story from all those he had before him is also significant, and is itself a kind of summoning and conjuration, grounding the fiction that followed it. If the essay now seems to be merely a dry historical account, one thing today still remains evocative in this important act of historical reprieve and textual retrieval. Now perhaps, the most important aspect of Lal’s text that stays with us long after we read its factual rendering is his startling title: Kunti’s cry may once have rung out across the cane fields, but with Lal’s evocative title to drive it, it does indeed ring down across the ages to haunt us all.

Genre was important from the very outset in another sense too. Even before Lal wrote his analysis, Sanadhya himself chose a narrative style. Where the editors of Sanadhya’s book see his work as propaganda rather than history, the reason for this perception lies in the fact that things are told as stories. Mishra points out that the ‘story’ becomes an issue of generic displacement; but however this is viewed, the affective strategy works. Still, Mishra proffers a key question here: why use the affective logic of storytelling rather than the truth-logic of a news report or legal statement? Is Kunti actually telling the truth, he wonders—and does it matter? (Mishra, ‘Concerning an Axiom’) The answer, it seems, is that stories have the capacity to trigger far greater responses than reports—and stories sometimes are also true in ways that go beyond the way things happened to happen.

So let us take up this text as it has been retrieved and reprieved in its more recent life in fiction. I begin with Subramani’s story, ‘Tell Me Where the Train Goes’. This story has been widely discussed, and deservedly so. ‘Tell Me Where the Train Goes’ today is still the most powerful of the re-enactments of the original scene of indenture. In this story, unlike the original history (but consistent with other histories of the time), Kunti’s husband is murdered and she is an outcast. Subramani’s Kunti is agentive, like some women in her position, and to survive, she has sex with the white owner, Mr Pepper. The story’s title, ‘Tell me Where the Train Goes’, suggests bitterly and ironically a forlorn version of a child’s question to his mother (Ma, tell me where the train goes?), and it has its own terrible answer even before the story commences—cane trains, like the indentured fodder who work them, are going nowhere. They go to the mill, and then back again. In a terrifying scene worthy of any analysis of collective rage, the men join the women to capture Mr Pepper, and take turns urinating on ‘the wriggling figure’ (17).

But Mr Pepper’s fate is not the central narrative point of the story. The story is told with off-centre focalization from Manu. This fact alone is important. It lets us know that we are to see this as a story of legacy. Manu is the mostly silent witness to his mother’s public humiliation, as well her private anger.
and frustration, and most frightening of all, her despair and neglect. As events close in on the ruined little family, Manu is our eyes and ears, and we are given access to his feelings via the narration. His feelings stand for rather more than his own personal pain, but are part of the broader frustration, rage and despair that indenture brought.

In terms of a generational legacy contextualized by an event, there is considerable value in relating this text to another, Jean Rhys’ analysis of the Creole culture left behind when slavery was abolished. In her *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys retells *Jane Eyre* from the half-colonial point of view, the apparently off-centre character ‘Bertha’ in *Jane Eyre*. ‘Bertha’ is presented in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a nickname for Antoinette by Rochester, her colonizing husband. Antoinette is not just renamed by him, but is not trusted by him, and driven mad by him. Just as Rhys retells a story to reveal a wider legacy, so too does Subramani. In ‘Tell Me Where the Train Goes,’ Manu is the child of indenture; he is a child born of indentured parents, and as such he is a synecdoche of an aspect of its destiny.

In Rhys’s terrifying novella on inter-ethnic and inter-class sexuality and power, where the little Antoinette huddles next to her imagined safe places, such as a moss-covered wall (9, 12), and in her room, as the danger comes, we are told that ‘the safe feeling left me’ when the candle goes out (19). Nor is Manu safe. As with Antoinette, we feel this from the very outset. We are told that he feels ‘terribly lonesome and afraid’ (11), and as events transpire, he feels ‘a sudden chill’ (12), that he is ‘paralyzed with fear’ (12), and we learn he actually feels safer when he sleeps outside away from the lines, although even here he felt ‘afraid too’ (14). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, animals are killed brutally as a message to the family. At the very outset, we learn of the ‘horse lying down under the frangipani tree. I went up to him but he was not sick, he was dead and his eyes were black with flies’ (5-6). Later Antoinette imagines she has a ‘big Cuban dog to lie by my bed and protect me’ (19). If there is no actual dog in this story, there is one in ‘Tell Me Where the Train Goes’. Like the horse in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the dog, Tipo, is killed. It is dumped on the doorstep, dead, ‘a deep wound gouged on his back; it opened like an ugly and festering mouth’ (15). In both texts, birds die: in one, the shocking image of a pet parrot trying to fly with its feathers on fire (22-23); in the other, we have a dead Mynah dumped on the doorstep (15). Subramani’s story finishes with unbridled terror as Manu and Kunti flee for their lives—or deaths?—ahead of the vengeful and damaged crowd. In the moments after being struck—we already suspect fatally—by the train, Manu realizes even while Kunti is promising escape, that there was ‘nowhere to go’ (18). In the final sentence of the story, with her hands in his hair, as he drifts slowly out of consciousness, we are told that he feels ‘strangely exhilarated and safe’ (18). The affective structure of Manu’s experience is the point of the story—and the child-focalisation (but not point of view) is one of the most
shocking dimensions of its power. Yet the story is also about the violence of the indenture itself, which is the source of the trauma. In this respect, Subramani’s uncompromising historical spectre never deviates from its bleak trajectory.

**Figural Recreation**

*Conjuration*: a critic with a pen or keyboard, the style in which we asynchronously but solemnly summon a spectre, and verify our rites of writing. Or an artist seeks to recreate a character, Totaram, for instance. Sudesh Mishra’s *Ferringhi* has an extraordinary, but all too brief moment when the memory of Totaram Sanadhya is conjured up, and solemnized in exactly this way. This time, a lesson is learnt, as Mooves, one of the characters with political amnesia, comes to his senses. It begins with the ferringhi saying that an archetypal figure called ‘girmitiya’ wanted to teach him history. To this, one of the characters says, ‘tell us gang what he say’ (358). The ferringhi explains that there was once a ‘Kai-India’ called ‘Tota’ (an abbreviation of Totaram) who was taught to be obedient, and that this extended beyond his family to the zamindar. There follows a trance-scene where an interaction between the zamindar and Totaram is portrayed:

| Tota: Your wishing is my command, maibaap.                        |
| Zamindar: I’m having to wish you away, Totaram. (356) |

The scene changes again, so that the Zamindar morphs into a recruiter:

| Tota: (suddenly recognizing the recruiter) Maibaap, what are you doing here? How are you being in two places in the same minutes? |
| Recruiter (imperiously): Chup raho! Yaha par ao.⁶ |

(Tota approaches the recruiter who grabs his thumb and, dousing it in ink, presses it to the form. Tota pulls back his thumb sharply.)

| Tota: (studying his thumb with alarm) Maibaap, what is this black magic you are doing on me? |
| Recruiter: (relaxing and laughing in his chair) It is white magic Totaji. Your life has been very hard, ha? |
| Tota: Sometimes, Sahib. |

---

⁶ Shut up! Come over here!
Recruiter: But now you go on a voyage, across the seven seas, to swarg.\(^7\) There you’ll find sweetness. In fact, Totaji, you’ll be surrounded by nothing but sweetness. (356-57)

Promising that he will find sweetness that will be like ‘Ram Raj’ (the kingdom of Ram), the bitter irony of course is that this is not the sweetness the colonial figure has in mind for Totaram—on the contrary, he is destined to cut cane, sugar cane. Then, when the amnesiac companions ask what the ghostly figure of Totaram does next, Mooves, the character to whom all this memory is returning, shouts ‘Is what the fallah do!’ and slams down the bilo he has been using to serve all the others in the grog circle up to this point of the play (357). Totaram, in this story, appears as a historical ghost, possessing Mooves, so that he remembers the story, his story.

Images and the Living Present

Sanadhya’s memory has also been kept alive in other, even more recent, Indo-Fijian writings, notably Mohit Prasad’s *Songs of the Jahajin*. The summoning in this case is quite different in nature. This collection is built around a set of old photographs. While words can seem distant, the impression of immediacy with photographs is far more powerful. Looking at them, we imagine that they capture the reality of life itself.

But the image too is part of the process we are seeking to understand. Indeed, to gaze upon a photograph, as Roland Barthes pointed out in beautiful lines in his *Camera Lucida*, is to gaze upon mortality. In this book, his mother just having died, he meditates on old photographs of his mother, and a strange dance of life and death ensues (67ff). Even old photographs of ourselves are distant from us, images of ones we no longer feel ourselves to be: we have aged, our looks have changed. To look at photographs of loved ones now gone is to be brought face to face with death, not for itself, for surely the vivifying image entails the very opposite. Stranger still, when we look at even older photos, of people we never could have known, we find a strange reversal, as we wonder what these lives were, as we wonder who these people were, how they lived, and what they experienced, images of the dead that remind us that we must live.

If we open *Songs of the Jahajin*, we are confronted with posed photographs, images of sketches, photos of crowd scenes. The images are archival, sourced from Fiji, but also, some taken in Lahore, in modern day Pakistan. Prasad’s very text operates in this space between conjuring and conjuration, at once

---

7 Ha (yes); Swarag is a Hindu concept, equivalent to the concept of heaven.
solemnizing the dead, remembering them, honouring them, and yet summoning them, calling on their imagined collective spirit, asking that it reveal itself as it inhabits the very being of a people.

Throughout the collection, too, Prasad explicitly evokes a ghost. He does this both in the work itself but even at the outset in what he calls ‘envoi’. Envoi means not just a dispatch or letter, but also, as in the story of Fijian indenture and subsequent emigration, the sending of money. The poems show the hard realities of commerce and trade encountered by the Girmitiya (and even girmit, it should be remembered, relates to a commercially enforceable contract). The figures he evokes in this collection are explained as follows:

The three people are Maina, the ancestral woman of the Indo-Fijians who came to Fiji in a ship, a ‘jahaj’ therefore as a female variant a ‘jahajin’. … They never met the bania and the balladeer, though both were of east and west. (1)

Prasad tells us that this female spirit is ‘tough, irascible, loving’ and that she had to learn to control ‘men, other women, children, capital and sugar’ (1). After this prelude, there are a series of photographs and poems. ‘Death speaks to life’ as Fiske et al. put it: as with Mishra, this time what death says is rather different from the message of the monuments. More perhaps than Mishra, Prasad’s conjuring is at once solemn in its bearing witness; it is also both rite of summoning and of exorcism, a revelation that, as Derrida’s quasi-religious language would have it, we are bearing witness to an onto-theology first of all, but also, an ontology and theology of an entire imagined people.8

As we leaf through the poems, and I know of no other collection that through its haunting array of photographs has achieved this effect, there is a sense of particular stories, particular days, particular scenes. The photographs challenge us just as they challenged Prasad, and his poems, as responses to the pictures, also in their turn challenge us with their readings of the images. We see scenes of the recruiting in Lahore (42), and as we gaze at the photo, we are in the position of the photographer all those years ago.9

As modern readers looking back on these images, we are summoning up these spectres for needs of our own, and making associations of our own. Hence Prasad captions his images with comments that shatter the historical illusion, calling

8 We should not omit Mishra’s important extended prose poem, ‘Diaspora and the Difficult Art of Dying’, with its tale of an entire people contracting a levitating illness (a pun on the clichéd guru, but also on the fact of rootlessness). It gains both its ability to talk coherently of a people and of spiritual possession (and actual dispossession) from this set of accounts. I have written about this superb piece elsewhere (‘The Remembering Ferringhi.’).

9 Viewer positioning in photography is well understood. Christian Metz’s observations on cinema explain the effect very well (788-90).
one of them apt as part of an ‘anthropology of postcards’, not just because these are stock images, but because the woman figured is ‘posed as if she is taken from a modern Bollywood daytime soap’ (32). Citing Walter Gill’s respected, yet date-marked history, he points to an exoticization of the subject. Under all that, though, there is the ever present experience of work, of labour as something that is both legacy and something ongoing. Whatever the image means, he says, ‘her clasped hands probably close over calluses and the receding life-line that the plantation brings to her’ (32). In the poem that accompanies the image, Prasad reflects on the rendering object of the woman subject, as part of a cargo, a chattel, as something to bid for at an auction: ‘No one ever saw her as woman in this dominion of men/chattel of possibilities dark thoughts on both lines’ (33). In ‘Horse Trading at the Depot’ (35) we see how trading in ‘flesh’ takes place, whether the flesh be human or horse (34).

**Telling Life: Stories or Fictions or Theories**

So the rites have been performed, and we now bear witness to a summoning, and indeed, an exorcism. Yet, a gently mocking voice urges, Totaram did not write for this purpose—he wrote just for the first sense—his conjuring was written for the sense that Derrida describes: performative action. And he wrote for his own time. In so doing we are reminded that writing, in the Derridean as well as the everyday sense of the word, is, notwithstanding all that has gone before, an act of the living (even when it concerns the dead, even though death is in its very weave). Writing life then: to set down for others in some imagined future time, perhaps even after my death, this account of what I really knew and saw and felt. Sometimes, the writing is only for the here and now. Yet in the attempt to preserve life, we are reminded of how it immediately recedes from our touch.

There is often in Fijian and Fiji-Indian writing a recourse to personal anecdote, to memory. Perhaps Sanadhya is merely the first in a line of writers who seek to set down in vivid prose the things that go on before their eyes. While space limits such inquiry, I begin by noting a collection edited by Kavita Nandan that allows us to see how the process of life itself is captured in stories. Indeed, Nandan herself remarks that the remarkable feature of the ‘stories’ she has gathered together to edit (they are often non-fiction works, albeit still stories) is that they ‘breathe life into the worlds they are describing; to imagine the past in to being, sugarcane stick by sugarcane stick, step by step on a dusty road of remembrances’ (xi). Notice the accent on tactility, on the repeated sensation.

---

10 In his comprehensive doctoral dissertation, Prasad has written tellingly of this, as well as in considerable detail about many of the essays in the *Stolen Worlds* compilation. The thesis is available online (see 93-101).
‘Sugarcane stick by sugarcane stick’: each one cut, each one a part not just of the gross domestic product, but of a daily grind of farmers living on uncertain leases, struggling to survive. In such writing, experience is always localized; memory is tactile. And in it, perhaps, we have another kind of haunting: a genre that lingers on in which facts are simply retold, but as narratives, true stories.

**Hauntologies**

It seems, then, that we are indeed haunted, and that the spectre extends beyond Fiji itself. Not only was the line where Totaram Sanadhya was housed seen as haunted at the time, but his text is part of a wider scene of haunting. Haunting involves rites, solemnity, and exorcism. In our returns to the dead, however, we bring them into a strange kind of life. When someone writes a text, there is no way of knowing what will happen to it. The journey of this text is still incomplete, and it is in our hands today not just because Sanadhya wrote it, nor even because it was influential in India and then Fiji in the early twentieth century. Rather, it is in our hands today because writers like Lal and Subramani summoned it back into life.

In a route that is strange indeed, the hauntology of indenture is part of the very question of tradition itself. This wonderful Latin-laden word has embedded in it another more pragmatic process of writing. *Trado—* *I hand on, I betray, I surrender*: the returning Sanadhya did all three when he wrote his text: like all writing, it passes on a message. But then, in the same movement, it escapes his hand, his control, his governance. In surrendering, even betraying his story to us, though, he also, perhaps paradoxically, performed a great act of trust. His story was written to change things; escaping his hand, it has, through all those who have inflected it, been entrusted to us to change things anew. The scene that is inscribed in it also concerns life and death in the most fundamental way. Indenture with all its logics of ethnicity and class, led directly to death—deaths even on the first ship to arrive, the *Leonidas*, with its deaths *en route*, deaths in the fields, deaths by disease, and deaths by overwork. These deaths occasioned by indenture, *destined* by indenture, haunt the present. So too does Sanadhya’s text. If the way they appear to us is in the form of a historical demand for justice, this helps us understand why something of that need haunts us still.

---

11 I have discussed this elsewhere in more detail (‘New Media’). One particularly striking Latin account of the link between verb and noun I came across more recently. The noun *traditio* does not just mean handing over, surrendering or teaching, but more literally, ‘a giving over by means of words, an instruction’ (Cassell’s *Latin Dictionary*, New York: Wiley, 1959, p.609). Our words, it seems, betray us even as we utter them.
John O’Carroll is a researcher in the fields of Australian and Pacific Literature, as well as aspects of social and cultural analysis. With Bob Hodge, he is author of Borderwork in Multicultural Australia; with Chris McGillion, he is author of Our Fathers, a book on the lives and views of Australian priests. With Chris Fleming, he has also recently published a chapter in Kafka’s Cages, a book on modernity and Franz Kafka’s Trial. He works at Charles Sturt University, but has worked also at James Cook University, Murdoch University, the University of Western Sydney, and the University of the South Pacific, in Suva.

Works Cited


Rip Van Winkle in Fiji

Adrian Mayer

The story of a person who falls asleep for many years and is then confronted with a changed society is one which exists in several cultures, most notably in Washington Irving’s story of Rip van Winkle, who returns to his village in upstate New York after twenty years. Though I cannot claim to have been asleep, I recently returned to Fiji after an interval of some forty years. Hence, I can share in some of the astonishment that greeted Rip van Winkle and which he reciprocated among the inhabitants he met. I have been assured that this situation is worth recording, and so I make bold to share some impressions of my month’s stay in Fiji in late 2010. This had come about because of a lunch which I had had earlier that year in London with Chris Gregory, a fellow anthropologist and Indianist, who had suggested that I revisit whilst he was able both to take me around and to contact people in the settlements before my arrival—it was an invitation too good to turn down.

First, I should reiterate that, in fact, my sleep had been rather longer than Rip’s. I had first come to Fiji in August 1950 with my wife Kaia, and spent a year in the country, publishing an account of my stay entitled *Peasants in the Pacific* (1961). The ‘peasants’ in this title stemmed from a system of indenture under which some 60,000 Indians had been brought to Fiji between 1879 and 1916 to cultivate sugar cane. Many of these stayed after their indenture had ended, continuing to farm cane and constituting a major proportion of Fiji’s population. My research centred on the question of what kind of community these people had formed in settlements which had grown up of people from different regions of India and with no previous ties of family or village. To answer this we lived in three settlements of cane farmers, two in Viti Levu and one in Vanua Levu.1

In 1971 I had returned to Fiji for two months, visiting two of these settlements in each of which I spent a fortnight, after which an enlarged edition of the book was published (1973). One might expect that a return in 2010 would mainly bring back memories of the more recent visit and that the earlier one would remain largely out of sight. But this would be to ignore the tendency of the old to retain memories of long duration over more recent impressions: and so I found that I mainly thought of the original visit, with the later one being largely out of sight. For instance, when I walked down Suva’s Victoria Parade looking...
in vain for the Club Hotel, I remembered it as it was in 1950, wooden and with its wide upper veranda, rather than the 1971 concrete building erected after a cyclone had destroyed the old hotel.

But let me start at my arrival in Fiji in 2010. I note in my diary: ‘After leaving Nadi, frame wooden houses, some on stilts, set among messy yards of broken material, or tidy gardens. Then a few patches of cane, some of tapioca, but much apparently fallow land, tangled vegetation and bits of jungle. Only near Suva and Navua are there neat rows of dalo. The gathering impression: Fiji is now much more like other such tropical places than it was. I saw only two bures between Nadi and Suva and even these were ceremonial’. Suva gave me a similar impression of convergence, as several comments attest: ‘Suva is strange [to me], downtown is bustling with shops, malls, tall buildings and people in jeans, bula shirts and shorts if not miniskirts. Every now and then I come across a scene which superimposes itself on an earlier one—of frame buildings, empty streets, and the whiff of copra in the air. The present Suva seems incongruous, yet when I take it in I realise that this is the real Fiji and that I am here. Since this seems entirely improbable, both pictures have an air of unreality’. Again I note: ‘Suva, like so many other places is now “globalised”. Why not, this goes with a higher standard of life’. I was constantly comparing in my mind’s eye, with such comments as: ‘Through the residential area in Samabula. Funnily enough, it reminded me of Puerto Iguazú! [a town in northern Argentina]. Quite large and well maintained frame houses, lots of green shrubs around, a certain untidiness in the driveways or around the houses, shops pretty small and simple, a tropical feel to it’. And again: ‘We had lunch of dosa in a glitzy mall—it could have been Brent Cross [in north London], except for the people and the open air that refreshed us. Suva is small enough not to be a city, but it is a capital with formal buildings like the Secretariat’.

Almost all my time on previous visits had been in rural settlements, and so, after a few days, I made for Korociri (which I had called Delanikoro in my book), in the Rewa valley not far from Nausori. Previously the settlement had been distanced from Nausori by open countryside. Now the road to the settlement was bounded by houses for its entire length, the temple at Vuci enlarged and decorated. In Korociri itself the pattern of settlement had changed, with a shift of population to the western part, and houses were half hidden behind lush gardens of trees and bushes. Only Damodar remained of the adults I had known in 1950 (see the ‘whipper’ in Peasants 1961: plate Xllb). I was happy to see him not only because he had by now built and was managing an impressive temple, but also because ‘I was delighted to hear him speak in Indo-Fijian Hindi—“baitho” used for forms of “hona”, and verbs used in the imperative’.

My wife and I had been especially close to two neighbouring families. One was headed by Pandit Brij Biharilal: his grandson Dharmendra was living at a much
improved homestead though Dharmendra’s mother Dayanti had died, much to my sorrow, for she was my wife’s especial favourite and a marvellously spirited child and later woman. In Suva I later met Deven, the Pandit’s great grandson from the other family branch and a highly successful businessman. The other homestead had contained Gangaya’s large family, with whose wife, four sons, two daughters and a daughter-in-law (see Peasants 1961: plate XVb) we were in daily touch. The family was still there—his son Balram and granddaughter Savita, and her daughter Arti among others—and were warmly welcoming. With all these and others it was as if I had hardly been away: no Rip van Winkle feelings here! Although the homesteads and their surroundings looked very different, the welcome, the sense of humour, the food, in fact the general ambiance, hadn’t changed.

The same could be said of my visit to Moto (Vunioki) on the other side of Viti Levu. Here again the countryside had changed, it felt greener and more ‘overgrown’. (My perception of this change was not new, for I had noted it in 1971 (Peasants 1973: 195), but now I again compared it to 1950.) In Korociri we had stayed in a newly-constructed shop, a single room with an annexe behind: the shop was still there, but it had now grown to include a side room in which there was a billiard table, and I believe rooms behind.

Figure 1: Korociri—Our house in 1950.
In Moto we had stayed in a grassy field which had two bures, one for our living and a smaller one for the kitchen. I knew exactly where it was, but when I got there I saw that the field had been partitioned and in it were three frame houses, one of which was on the spot of our bure, now shaded by coconut palms and surrounded by a garden.
I was downcast, thinking that all had changed, but when I enquired, I found that one of the houses was occupied by the brother of our then landlord Ram Das, a dainty little chap who had managed one of the two shops at the Moto cross roads. I had not known this brother, he was living in Tavua during our stay, but I quickly established our link and we had a most convivial evening together. As in Korociri there were people no longer alive, whom I missed—for instance, the three brothers whose faces look out from my book (Peasants 1973: plates XVIb & XXa) and among them especially Parmanand Singh with whom I had stayed in 1971. Luckily Parmanand’s daughter-in-law Rattan Kaursingh now occupied the homestead, and in two nearby homesteads were brother Arjun Singh’s son and his widow. I recalled Arjun’s house as I had seen it in 1971 and compared it with Rattan’s present bungalow.
The third settlement, Coqloa (Naboulima), on Vanua Levu was the place in which we had spent the least time; nevertheless I was keen to see it again. My first surprise came when I arrived at what had, in 1950, been the end of the
road—literally, for only the CSR railway went on to the Wainikoro valley. In 1971 there had been a rustic signpost, but now there was a smart roundabout with a sign saying ‘Welcome to Coqeloa’ and the road continued past it.

Figure 7: Coqeloa—Road junction 1971.

Figure 8: Coqeloa—Road junction 2010.
Nearby was a shop, and from it I learned that my friend Girwar Prasad was no more. I went to the homestead where we had been Shyam Lal’s guests as the occupiers of his storage belo; alas, neither he nor Ram Lal his son were alive, though their descendants welcomed me. The homestead had been so rearranged as to be unrecognisable, but the contours of the settlement were as I remembered them. Coqeloa is situated in the valley of the Bucaisau river where it emerges from the hills into a wide plain, with rocky mountains on the inland side, giving some of the most beautiful views I have seen in Fiji (see Peasants 1961: plate Ib). Searching for the temple to Ganga Mata I came to the site of the CSR overseer’s house, where Mr and Mrs Wilkins had been hospitable to me when I came down with a bout of appendicitis. In its place was a school: it looked impressive, but I was told that its numbers had been diminished by emigration and a low birth rate from a former enrolment of some 300 children to its present 130.

Nearby Labasa had changed of course, but it was still a fairly small town (though in 1950 we thought it a sophisticated centre for recreation!). We had stayed at the Grand Eastern Hotel, which had been a ‘Somerset Maughamish’ place in the ’50s but which had now been enlarged and modernised.
Figure 10: Labasa—Grand Eastern hotel 2010.

Nobody from the days of H.B. Gibson the proprietor and his friends was around, but I had a very enjoyable meeting with Paul Jaduram, whose father had given us a memorable send-off feast, and at whose Majestic Cinema we had been avid clients.

Figure 11: Labasa—Majestic Cinema 1950.
Paul’s daughter told us that there were now no fewer than five hotels in Labasa, partly due to the flow of pilgrims from other parts of Fiji (as well as overseas) to the Nag shrine on the outskirts of town. The rock representing the deity is said to grow miraculously, and the reader can judge from the photos I took in 1950 and 2010 how true this is.

Figure 12: Labasa—Nag shrine 1950.

Figure 13: Labasa—Nag shrine 2010.
It was in Moto that I felt most like Rip van Winkle, perhaps because I knew that settlement best. As I gazed over the green and wooded countryside that lay under the line of hills to the south I identified the location of homesteads, giving them the names of the proprietors I had known. These were the names from 1950 not 1971, for the former were the clearer in my memory. ‘Isn’t that X’s place?’ I would say, and the reply, after a somewhat stunned silence, would be ‘Yes, but it is actually now Y’s place, though I do remember X’s name’, perhaps that of an indentured grandfather long since gone. From this we might start talking about 1950, or 1971, recalling events which marked the settlement’s history—for instance about weddings or disputes, the knowledge of which made me a genuine, because I think trusted though transitory, participant in the settlement’s history.

Many material aspects of life were very different in the three settlements. I have already noted the almost complete absence of bures in Fiji, but there were also few of the simple one- or two-roomed houses made of corrugated iron. In 1950 these had had little but basic furniture (beds, a table and simple chairs, usually a sewing machine, and tin trunks under the beds), with any decoration stretching to a few illustrated calendars and perhaps pictures of Hindu deities or the Ka’ba at Mecca. By 1971 frame houses had started to appear, but in 2010 these dominated, comfortable bungalows with a full range of household and kitchen appliances, and a sitting room with easy chairs and many ornaments—fluffy toys, souvenirs, photographs—adorning the table on which stood the television. The standard of living had visibly and markedly improved, perhaps with the help of the occasional remittance from family overseas.

Figure 14: Korociri—kitchen.
The mention of overseas kin brings up another tremendous change. In 1950 kin groups had been relatively compact, since the founding, indentured, ancestor was in some cases still living, and in most others of only one ascending generation. By 2010 two or three generations had elapsed and families had spread, both into other settlements or towns in Fiji but especially overseas, principally to New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the US. However, it appeared that the mobile phone was keeping these far flung kin in as close contact as if they had been living at opposite ends of the settlement. When ‘Sadhu’ Chetty took me to Korociri I saw the house in which my good friend and Sadhu’s father Rajaram had lived—and Sadhu straightaway called him up in Sydney and we arranged a day for me to meet him there. In Moto, I asked Rattan what had become of Parmanand’s younger daughter Rajni, who had been the brightest
of small girls in 1971, and whose photo I had with me. ‘Oh, she is in Auckland’ said Rattan, and at once telephoned her: as we spoke she recalled that I was the first person to give her a doll as a present. Later, her brother Anand in Sacramento called up to see how I was. I could go on. Almost all families had members overseas, sometimes all except the person who had stayed behind in Fiji to look after the property. A transnational family had been created, coming together for weddings etc. with visits both from and to Fiji, and staying in emotional contact through phone calls.

I found it interesting to compare this ease of contact with the outside with the situations in 1950 and 1971. In 1950 (Peasants 1961: 186, 188-90) I wrote that a few men went to New Zealand for temporary work only from Korociri, the nearest settlement to Suva. In addition, some of the remaining India-born availed themselves of the free visit to India allowed under their indenture contract. I described (189-90) the return of one of these men with other ex-indentureds (girmityas)2 on the steamship Sirsa, and how this excited little interest in the settlement, by contrast to the welcome given to a few young men returning from short working visits to New Zealand. In 1950, interest in India came mainly through Indian films and to a lesser extent radio and newspapers.

Figure 16: Suva—Arrival of the ‘Sirsa’.

2 Girmityas/girmityas: indentured labourers. Girmit, the term for the indenture system, is thought to derive from the English word ‘agreement’. Ed.
By 1971 the situation had changed. Not only were there many more men who had gone from Korociri to temporary jobs in New Zealand and the New Hebrides, but the nature of journeys to India had altered. By now there were very few if any girmityas left, but the following generations had the education, money and curiosity for a few to seek out their ancestral villages. I met some who had done so, as my diary notes. One ‘had learnt before going, the names of people in Fyzabad from letters his mother used to receive’. He wrote to them and was received and lodged ‘in a modern house “with crockery, tables and an o.k. lavatory”’. Later he went to the village, but didn’t stay there and fell ill from ‘heatache’ [sic]. I note for another visitor: ‘when he left from the station his three relatives stood rigidly with hands in namaste till the train was out of sight, [and] he felt a great lump in his throat’.

By 2010 visits to and from overseas relatives had become banal, and I now noted an interest in ancestral genealogies. When I spoke with people about the ascendants who had lived in their present homesteads at the time of my first visit, they wanted to know how I recalled these links. I showed them their genealogies, and sometimes they would spread these out and have amusing and sometimes controversial discussions bringing them up to date. I well remember such an occasion in Moto, where the genealogy of my old friend Mustafa’s son Mobin was spread out, the talk being accompanied by generous bowls of yaqona before an excellent dinner.
In this way I also got an idea of the very extensive outward migration of so many of these families. In 1950 the India generation had still been present, represented by perhaps cantankerous or boring old men, and interest in their stories was small. By 2010, these men had vanished into a second or third ascending generation. The interest in the genealogies of that time, sometimes including shipmate (jahaji bhai)\(^3\) relations, evinced a similar desire to ‘return to roots’ that the visits to India had shown in 1971.

Besides the genealogies, the photographs I brought served as my introduction. These were mainly the portraits of individuals taken in 1950. I had some 60 of these, and was able to distribute almost all, some directly to relatives and others to people who undertook to pass them on to a relative perhaps now living abroad. Some were delivered in dramatic circumstances, as this entry in my diary suggests: ‘The sun was now shining as we drove to Moto to deliver a photo of Bangaru’s wife to his son’s son Chandra. We found his homestead more or less where I remembered it, and as we drove up to it we met a cane cutting gang, dragging cane loads by tractor to a lorry whose thickset, dark driver could only be of Bangaru’s family. It was. I delivered the photo of his grandmother amid much oohing and aahing. It then turned out that another gang member was the son of Pabbar, so I could also deliver a photo of Nandan, Pabbar’s girmitya father. Identifying various nearby homesteads, I mentioned Sukhari’s. One of the cutters said ‘That’s my grandfather’. I replied ‘I have a photo of Ram Devi with me’ [see Peasants 1961: plate XIIIa]. ‘My mother!’ So I was able to give him the only photo he had ever seen of his mother as a young woman. As I wrote: ‘He was absolutely overcome, flabbergasted—and so was I, moved by his reaction and also by memories of Ram Devi’s friendship with my own departed wife. It was moist eyes and a big hug from this stocky, weather-beaten cane-cutter’.

---

\(^3\) *Jahaji bhai*: in Hindi, literally ‘boat brother’. Refers to the relationships formed between male indentured labourers on the long sea-journeys from India to Fiji and other destinations during the indenture period. These relationships often cut across caste, religious and other divisions that would have precluded such friendships in India. *Ed.*
Figure 18: Moto—Ram Devi’s son.

Figure 19: Moto—Ram Devi’s son with author.
Again, in Coqeloa I was casually going through photos not yet distributed and came to a group of people whom I could not identify, when one of those present suddenly said ‘That is my father’, pointing to a small child held on the hip of one of the women, his grandmother.

![Figure 20: Coqeloa—Ashok’s father as a baby in 1950.](image)

He was thunderstruck and so was I, and I later delivered another copy to his father, now an old and sick man living near Nausori.

I did not in 1971 have photos to help in breaking the ice, though I was able to show my book to a few people.
Figure 21: Korociri—Sanjibaiya peruses book 1971.
Generally, however, the thaw took longer than in 2010, though with the same result. As I related in my diary of that time, ‘I have been struck by the rapid change of attitude when people found out who I was. Coming to a house, people were completely hatchet-faced, leaning against the door, watching me approach. My first questions were answered with a minimum of expression and words. [But] then, when light finally dawned, an immediate change took place. A chair, tea, food was offered, animated talk, the lot’.

Travelling to the settlements, I was impressed by the improvement of roads which had been fairly basic on earlier visits, and was also able to take new roads into the interiors of both islands which had been inaccessible in 1950. Chris drove me by the direct road from Ba to Sigatoka, passing the marvellous scenery around Mbukuya, and we also went along the Waidina valley with its impressive gorge, continuing down the picturesque Wainikoroiluva valley.

![Figure 22: Waidina valley view 2010.](image)

In Vanua Levu the road from Labasa to Savusavu was exemplary, and the rough road through the mountains from Vanuavou to the Bucaisau valley produced some splendid views but also evidence of the way in which the ‘mile-a-minute’\(^4\) creeper has taken over large parts of the terrain.

---

\(^4\) ‘Mile-a-minute’: a term used locally in Fiji to refer to several different introduced species of fast-growing creepers which now cover large areas of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. One of these species, kudzu, was allegedly...
Figure 23: Vanua Levu—‘Mile-a-minute’ creeper.

Can it ever be eradicated? This must be a mounting problem for any future development of these areas. It was good to be able to see for the first time the beauty of the interior as well as Navala village, built entirely of bures and looking like any of those I had seen in 1950 but now a tourist attraction because of its singularity.

People frequently asked me: what changes did I see in the three settlements as a whole? On the basis of only a few days in each place I can only be impressionistic of course, but perhaps some random thoughts may be of interest. In 1950 one could broadly say that ‘cane was king’ in Moto. The cane grower walked tall when he came into town on a Saturday, and the elected head (sardar) of the single cane-cutting gang was a powerful and respected figure, his position much sought after. Behind the sardar lay the power of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) to which the growers were contracted and which had an overarching position in regard to cultivation, collection through its rail system, and milling.
Figure 24: CSR cane train 1950.

Though some people practiced mixed farming, without cane such people were less important, and there were few occupations outside farming and few positions of authority beyond the gang, though skill in dispute settlement might add to a person’s reputation.

By the time of my visit in 1971 the situation in Moto had been transformed. Cane was still king, but with a difference. It could now be cultivated on high ground that the CSR rail tracks could not reach, and the internal communication of paths had been transformed into roads which could be used by lorries to take away the cane (see Peasants 1973: plate XVIIb). As a result, there were many more growers—in fact almost all households were included, whereas in 1950 only 60% had been. But these were now in nine gangs, and authority was dispersed to their presidents and sardars, the latter now only executive officers. Of the men in non-agricultural occupations, one quarter were now commuting to Ba. My view was that the settlement had changed from being one in which
farming was a way of life to one in which it was a way of earning a living, one of several emerging alternatives which included work in town to which several young people aspired. There were more people (an increase of 67%), they were living better in terms of housing and possessions, but the settlement’s articulation appeared to be less dense and more ‘individualistic’, with fewer acknowledged positions of leadership.

My impression in 2010 was that this trend had continued. Cane was still cultivated and now almost entirely transported by lorry.

Figure 25: Cane lorries at Labasa mill 2010.

But its economic importance had diminished, for productivity was said to be lower and harvesting hampered by breakdowns at the sugar mill. Some farmers were turning to other crops—market gardening, pineapple cultivation. The gangs now included many Fijians, for want of local Indo-Fijian labourers. Moto supplied a member of the Advisory Committee, and in one locality there was said to be a Neighbourhood Watch to guard against petty larceny. But when I asked what would happen if there were a dispute or a fight, the answer was ‘I would pick up my mobile and call the police’; earlier, I think it would have been to seek the help of an influential man in the settlement. The school, which had a management committee, was said to be ‘only half full’. My speculation (Peasants 1973: 210) that the area around the two shops and petrol pump
might develop into a social centre had not materialised—indeed the pump had disappeared and the shops were no larger than before. To all of this was added the effect of the overseas emigration I have mentioned. From the answers of those whom I met, some 40% of adult males of Moto households now lived overseas; and many others had turned their thoughts to possible emigration. In short, Moto appeared to be a ‘hollowed out’ community compared to the one I had known. I do not use the word in a pejorative sense. I mean only that a significant proportion of people’s important social relationships, involving family and kinship especially but also economic, lay with those outside the settlement.

Korociri’s difference from Moto stemmed from its geographical position, on the windward side of Viti Levu and only 5 kms from Nausori and 26 kms from Suva. Though in 1950 the settlement produced some cane, it was paddy cultivation that predominated and, though there might be informal groups cooperating on transplanting, for example, there was no institutional position of leadership like the sardar’s. Already in 1950, 20 men worked full time in Nausori or Suva, with 12 others at the CSR mill. In place of the sardar the major leaders were those in informal associations—the Youth Association and the Ramayan Mandli—the former set up to organise cooperative settlement activities and arbitrate disputes.

By 1971 the sugar mill had closed and the population had increased by 23%. This was less than half of Moto’s increase, for several households had left Korociri, some to be near their work in Suva. In those remaining there were few full-time farmers, for the number of commuters had risen from 23% to 71% of adult males and Korociri had now become part of southeast Viti Levu’s ‘peri-urban zone’ (*Peasants* 1973: 214). The Youth Association had morphed into a School Committee, but this was without wider aspirations of social control. Most young men had by now been to New Zealand or the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) for fixed periods, though this source of work had diminished by 1971. Korociri in 2010 therefore presented a less changed appearance than Moto, because the settlement had simply enhanced its role as a dormitory suburb and its links with countries overseas had also continued, though changed from being ones of temporary labour on my first two visits to those of emigration.

I have a much less definite impression about Coqeloa. Suffice it to say that in 1950 it was even more than Moto a cane growing settlement, and that its distance from Labasa (to which it had only recently been connected by a bus service) meant that there were no commuters. I did not stay in Coqeloa in 1971, and my visit in 2010 was too short for much comment. Nevertheless, it was clear that cane cultivation had lessened in significance and that the settlement was now linked much more extensively to Labasa and the outside world (which here included Viti Levu to which a number of people had emigrated), though this seemed to be still less than in the other settlements.
My thumbnail sketches show that the settlements have had somewhat different trajectories, governed partly by their geographical position and nearness to urban sources of employment, but that a degree of convergence can also be discerned. Factors behind this include: a) the decreasing importance of cane; b) the increase in commuters, this being correlated perhaps with a decrease in the density of internal social relations with the implication this has for local leadership; and finally, c) the growing importance of transnational kinship relations. Underlying these factors was a convergence of style and level of living. For instance, everyone now lived in a frame (or less often an iron) house, no longer some in a bure or belo. Again, all seemed to have similar furniture, including TVs. Some were of course better and some less well-off, but the general parameters seemed to be more uniform than they had been.

These remarks are based on a superficial visit, and I put them forward only because they may serve as markers for those who make subsequent studies. For them, it is clear that no study of the Indo-Fijian diaspora could omit the transnational links that have grown up—that is, a study of the diaspora of the diaspora. In what ways do the people in this secondary diaspora govern or influence actions and motivations in Fiji; and what links have grown up within this diaspora itself? For example, when visiting the son of one of my Moto friends who was living in Sydney, I found that his wife went annually to Seattle to babysit her grandsons whilst their parents went on vacation. Many of my interlocutors in Fiji said that they were hoping, or planning, to leave the country, whose Indo-Fijian population percentage has already diminished from a peak of 50%—when there were fears of its ‘swamping’ the native Fijian population (Indians in Fiji, 60)—to some 36%. Might this secondary diaspora come to be larger than the primary diaspora, and with what social and economic implications for each?

I end with a few observations of a more personal nature, but which may be relevant for other Rip van Winkles. These deal with questions revolving around memory and distance. To begin, I must again mention that I often could not believe where I was: was I really in Fiji again? This feeling occurred not only during those first days in Suva, but also at other times during my stay. Why did this intimation of unreality persist? I think it was for two reasons. One was that Fiji was for me, a Londoner, literally at the other side of the world; and the other was that my memories of 1950 overlay the present and thereby rendered both ‘unreal’ in different ways.

Take, first, my perception of distance. In 1950, it had taken us nearly five weeks to go by ship from London to Sydney, then taking another ship for 3 days to Auckland and finally a plane to Nadi. Sea travel at that time was all about voyages, by that I mean travel to a destination for a purpose. (Nowadays sea travel consists mainly of cruises, but these are not voyages: they end at the
same place as they start and the destination is not the reason for the travel.) The present air journey from London to Suva, though long by present standards, was for me an ‘interlude’ rather than a ‘journey’, though I read into this long-haul flight the scale of distance that had operated in the days of my voyages. The unreality that I felt from time to time was thus partly an overlay on the present reality of my memory of long voyages. But partly it worked in the opposite direction. The growing convergence of clothing (jeans, trainers), diet (Indian food now one of the defaults for restaurants in both London and Suva), traffic problems etc. provided an overlay of sameness on my memory of distance-related difference and thereby created that unreality.

How were the various perceptions of what I was seeing and hearing influenced, mediated, by my memory? Elsewhere (‘Anthropological Memories’) I considered the role of memory in both anthropological research and subsequent writing up, distinguishing several types of revisit, and the different kinds of memory identified by writers on the subject. As an example of how the anthropologist might make use of memory, I cited my revisit in 1983 to the Indian village I had studied in 1954. Before going I identified two topics which I wished to study. When I tried to call up memories about the first—caste and commensal relations—nothing emerged. I suggested that this was because I had done much work on this topic during the intervening time, i.e. that there had been what can be called ‘retroactive inhibition’; that is, the intrusion of my detailed analysis (Caste and Kinship in Central India, 1960) on the subject on my memory. But the other topic, the ‘quality of life’, was not subject to this inhibition and thus called up memories which my subsequent visit confirmed to be relevant in interpreting the changed situation (‘Anthropological Memories’, 213-14).

Had I been going to Fiji in 2010 to do research, I would have tried to conjure up memories, later to see what contribution they made to what I found. In the event, my visit can be seen as the hors d’oeuvre for a meal which I did not then stay to eat. Some idea of what these memories would have been can be seen from those which came to me when I was actually in Fiji. The views of the settlements as ‘overgrown’, the interiors of houses as ‘over furnished’, the impression of a convergence of life style: each of these implied a previous memory. The first memory which struck me when coming to Moto and Coqeloa was of far-off homesteads. The actual distance might not have been great, but visits in 1950 had often involved a hot and tiring walk on dusty or muddy paths, sometimes having had to ford rushing streams. Indeed, much of my time in both settlements had been spent in going to homesteads, often to find them empty and my long walk wasted. Unsurprisingly, this memory accompanied my progress in Chris’s 4WD—the homesteads seemed to be so close to each other! I had no Proustian ‘pure memory’ of Fiji as I describe for the Indian village
(‘Anthropological Memories’, 215), but I believe that this may be because this could only have come to me during the years 1951-4, before my long stay in India overwrote such delicate traces.

All this is to say that memory would have been a significant constituent of a restudy in 2010, and that it could have been thus harnessed. In fact, my memories enriched my visit as well as providing an emotional bridge to the people I met. With them I recalled events which we had in common, and unlocked to a small extent the re-creation of the ties which I had had in 1950.

My writings on Fiji have finished with contrasting conclusions. I ended my first study in 1950 by saying: ‘it was a Gujarati-born in one of the settlements who advocated closer ties with India. … His Fiji-born hearers could not believe that they would ever have to leave Fiji. They felt themselves to be Fiji Indians, proud of their heritage, but equally proud of their place in the new society described in this book’ (Peasants 1961: 193). By 1963, I had somewhat tempered this view, and my concluding paragraphs outlined two possible paths in the future: one in which ‘the present communal separation will continue, with chronic tension and later, perhaps, periodic outbreaks of violence’; and the other foreseeing ‘a drawing together of the communities … through the positive efforts of leaders to cooperate with each other’, and I ended by saying that ‘whatever course is followed both faith and perseverance will be needed in the uncertain future which lies before Fiji’ (Indians in Fiji, 135). After my visit in 1971 I concluded that the settlements I knew best had seen ‘decades … of adaptation to change, and one can reasonably hope that this will continue’ (Peasants 1973: 223), a more anodyne statement than either of the two preceding ones.

What would I say after the present brief visit? I think that my conclusion of 1950 has been overtaken by events. Of the two paths suggested in the conclusion of 1963, it is perhaps the one of separation and tension which has been followed, yet not exclusively. As to the conclusion of 1973, Indo-Fijians are continuing to adapt to the changing situation, even if this means in part a continuing emigration, leaving the community a diminishing percentage of the total population with all that this implies. About the future I make no prediction. For, in my late eighties, I can hardly hope to return again to assess its validity, in short to assume yet again the role of Rip van Winkle in Fiji.

Adrian Mayer was a Research Scholar and then a Research Fellow at The Australian National University from 1950 to 1956, gaining his PhD at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Thereafter he was a member of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, retiring as Professor of Asian Anthropology in 1985. He was President of the Royal Anthropological Institute and holds its Rivers Memorial Medal, and is now an Honorary Fellow of SOAS.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the welcome and help I received during this visit from too many friends old and new to mention individually, both in the three settlements and in the University of the South Pacific, but particularly from Chris Gregory, who suggested this visit and who accompanied me throughout as my companion and amanuensis, and who with Judith extended to me such memorable hospitality, as well as their helpful comments on a draft of this article.

Works Cited


THE ECOLOGICAL HUMANITIES
Introduction and Farewell

Deborah Rose and Thom van Dooren

This issue of the Ecological Humanities is focussed on two of the greatest global phenomena that challenge contemporary social and cultural practice: the Anthropocene and climate change. In the first paper, Ben Dibley offers seven theses on the Anthropocene and ‘attachment’. He takes up questions of time, history, politics, and the human. Nick Mansfield presents an extended review essay that engages with the challenges of climate change. His essay starts with the prophetic words: ‘climate change will also bring with it problems to do with political time and historical time…’. In their contribution to this issue, Alice Robinson and Dan Tout bring their experience of drought into reflections on floods and belonging in the unique climate and culture of settler Australia. They explore what it means to call a place a ‘home’, and the need for settler societies to unsettle their own histories, ideas and relationships to produce more honest and sustainable possibilities for the future. These articles are all situated within an awareness of the far-more-than-human significance of events in this era of rapid change.

Meteorologists are telling us that La Niña will soon loosen her grip on Australia, and as El Niño gathers strength, we are likely to be entering another period of drought and—inevitably—fire. In light of climate change, unsettled expectations, challenging time concepts, and the near certainty of future bushfires in the ‘sunburnt country’, we asked Stephen Pyne to write an essay about fire in both its loved and unloved personae. Along with this reflective essay, we also offer a review of a new book by Matt Hall, *Plants as Persons* (SUNY Press).

We are experiencing both sweet and sad emotions as we announce that this will be the final issue of the *Australian Humanities Review* to contain a dedicated Ecological Humanities section. Over the past few years we have been closely monitoring the growth of the field of research that thrives under the rubrics of ecological and environmental humanities, and have come to the conclusion that there is a need for a new, international, open-access journal to publish outstanding scholarship that draws humanities disciplines into conversation with each other and with the natural and social sciences. With this context in mind, it is our delight to announce the establishment of a new journal: *Environmental Humanities*. The first issue of this new journal will appear in November 2012, with two issues following in each subsequent calendar year, continuing the pattern established in this journal <http://www.environmentalhumanities.org>.
Libby Robin and Deborah Bird Rose launched the Ecological Humanities section of the *Australian Humanities Review* in 2004 with the aim of ensuring that research addressing a blind spot in contemporary thought would have a well-ranked publication site. This blind spot was the place where ecological sciences and the humanities intersect. We launched the new journal section with an invitation (Rose and Robin 2004) to engage with the Ecological Humanities. In 2009 Thom van Dooren replaced Robin as co-editor.

The urgency of developing research excellence in the area of this intersection arises from the Anthropocene, and since our first issue in 2004 the need for this research has only grown. Over the course of a decade of publishing, we have offered several special issues, along with numerous original articles and reprints of a few ‘classic essays’. The special issues include:

- 2011 ‘Unloved Others: Death of the disregarded in the time of extinctions’, AHR 50.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the authors who have contributed to the Ecological Humanities, and all of the readers who have found intellectual sustenance in these pages. It is a pleasure to offer a warm invitation to continue these conversations in the coming years in a new international forum: *Environmental Humanities*. 
'The Shape of Things to Come':
Seven Theses on the Anthropocene
and Attachment

Ben Dibley

I.

Anthropocene as epoch and as discourse: As epoch and as discourse it would seem the Anthropocene has arrived. For it is a term that supplies an arresting image of a daunting development: the advent of a geological era of humanity’s own making. For the earth system scientists who have championed the notion, the Anthropocene signals a geological interval since the industrial revolution, where, through its activities, through its numbers, the human species has emerged as a geological force now altering the planet’s biosphere. Because of these developments the relatively benign planetary conditions of the Holocene—the previous 12,000 years, which enabled the establishment of agriculture and the rise of urban civilizations—are in the process of transformation.

The exponential growth in the human population and the associated resource intensive practices on which this is contingent have produced various stratigraphical signals. For earth system scientists the most obvious of these sedimentary layers is Anthropocene rock—the concrete, steel and bitumen of the planet’s cities and roads (Zalasiewicz et al., ‘New World’); while the most enduring are anthropogenic biochemical processes—emission of greenhouse gases, acidification of the oceans, modification of soils, destruction of biota and relocation of genetic stocks and increasingly codes. All of these are now in the process of permanently altering the earth’s systems and the evolutionary trajectory of planetary life (Zalasiewicz et al. ‘Are We Now?’; Steffen et al.). For the term’s advocates it is the emergence of the human species as this geological forcing agent that signals the close of the Holocene and the opening of a new epoch.

The notion of the Anthropocene, then, vividly captures the folding of the human into the air, into the sea, the soil and DNA.1 As a force imperilling ‘the

1 Here then, the notion of the Anthropocene might be seen as an implicit criticism of the hegemony of the climate crisis at the level of public discourse—in as much as the latter, in its staging in policy and popular imaginaries and, indeed, those of humanities and social science scholars, frequently neglects the couplings of the earth’s systems. In this, the Anthropocene serves as a reminder that the resolution of the climate crisis will
safe operating space for humanity with respect to the earth system’, it is an emergence that is simultaneously an emergency (Rockström et al. 475). As a pithy appellation the Anthropocene is a term increasingly entering public and policy discourses, and indeed, the lexicon of the humanities and social sciences.

II.

The Anthropocene is the crease of time: The Anthropocene is the appellation for the folding of radically different temporal scales: the deep time of geology and a rather shorter history of capital. The advent of the human as a geological agent demands ways of thinking these temporalities together. If, until relatively recently, earth scientists considered humans too new and too insignificant to impact on geological processes, social scientists and humanities scholars have long viewed the geological as far too slow moving to influence social transformations; particularly those over the last 400 years or so that concern students of modernity. When the geologic registers in the latter archive, it is as an inexplicable, violent intrusion into life. Famously, for example, the 1755 Lisbon earthquake solicited profound theological and philosophical investigations; more recently events such as the Asian Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina have prompted important insights into the social construction of disaster and its ensuing tragedy. In these treatises on corporeal frailty and moral culpability, the natural cataclysm is an episodic irruption into life that reveals its follies. The physical phenomenon itself is but a devastating glitch in an otherwise stable natural backdrop. In collision, then, the human and the geological remain separate entities.

However, it is clear that the emergence of the Anthropocene makes this assumption separating geological time and human time untenable. This of course is not to assert an anthropological dimension to the manifestation of earthquakes and

---

2 On the emergence of life as emergency see Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero.

3 For some examples limited to those that include the term in their titles see Boykoff; Dalby; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink; Hodson and Marvin; Lövbrand et al.; Rigby; Robin and Steffen; Shellenberger and Nordhaus. What is striking in the term’s migration into the discourses of the humanities and social sciences is that it has occasioned little critical reflection on the notion itself. However, see Lövbrand et al. and Crist. These two papers take positions respectively informed by governmentality theory and critical theory.
tsunamis; rather, it is to say that in an era of global anthropogenic environmental change an adequate investigation of contemporary social formations necessarily demands the simultaneous conceptualization of temporal scales that once appeared incommensurable.

In his ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, Walter Benjamin quotes an unnamed biologist who arrestingly captures the brevity of human existence on the planet: ‘In relation to organic life on earth ... the paltry fifty millennia of *homo sapiens* constitute something like two seconds at the close of a twenty-four hour day. On this scale the history of civilized mankind would fill one-fifth of the last second of the last hour’ (263). Read against the grain of Benjamin’s dialectical image and its truncation into Messianic time, the point would now be to see these closing split seconds as the increasingly critical ones where the particular antagonisms of capital unleash the potentiality to alter the trajectory of geological processes, and with it, the universal: life on earth. The significance of the Anthropocene in this sense is in naming this folding of geological time and the time of capital.

### III.

*The Anthropocene opposes freedom:* In its classical formulations political modernity is posed as the struggle for emancipation—as the escape from the shackles of nature, of tradition, of exploitation that foreclose on human dignity and liberty. It is a project that, historically, whether in its capitalist or socialist formulations, has been dependent on the massive appropriation of the Earth’s resources in its promise of the expansion of human freedom (as it is variously conceived). But it is a project whose externalities, as the economists would say, or in the parlance of the sociologists, its global risks, now radically put into question the assumptions on which such formulations rest; for the unintended consequences of modernity’s emancipatory quest now threaten with destruction its very life support system: the biosphere.

In one sense then the Anthropocene is a counter-discourse to globalization—a narrative of its externalities, its risks, its unintended consequences, its limits which now require calibration to identify ‘planetary boundaries’ that global modernity must not transgress if the safety of a Holocene-like condition is to be preserved (Rockström *et al.*). In another sense it is also a discourse, which—in its imbrications in proposals from technological fixes to global governance—is inescapably entangled in notions of reason and liberty inherited

---

4 However, there is evidence that recent volcanic activity such as that of *Eyjafjallajökull* in October 2010 have an anthropogenic dimension due to thinning of the arctic ice caps (see Sigmundsson *et al.*).


6 See Žižek’s (*Living* 330-337) objections to Chakrabarty’s (‘Climate of History’) theses.
from modernity’s project. This is so inasmuch as that task is one of securing the conditions whereby, as the notion’s interlocutors put it, ‘humanity has the freedom to pursue long-term social and economic development’ (Rockström et al.). This is a security contingent on a metrology of the Earth system that prepares it for the market, coding it as so many ecological stocks, services and sinks. This, at least, appears to be the predominant mechanism through which liberty in the Anthropocene will come to be ruled.

On the one hand then, what the Anthropocene poses as an epoch is not only potential tipping points in planetary biogeochemical processes which imperil the human species’ life-support system; it is also the antithesis of a politico-ontological condition central to modernity: freedom. That is, as an autonomous object of knowledge, the Anthropocene posits absolute limits to human activity, curtailing the sphere of human freedom. On the other hand, as a field of intervention, the parametric boundaries necessary to maintain a Holocene-like state are ones that are to be secured through market mechanisms. That is, as the target of policy discourse, the Anthropocene is a condition to be governed through freedom’s rule. For it is hoped that through such rule the planetary parametric boundaries will be secured, and with it the sphere of human freedom. This, at least, is the gamble of green capitalism.7

IV.

The Anthropocene—nostalgia for the human: The Anthropocene is an ambivalent formulation. It at once announces a new epoch and a new geological agent which would make any distinction between nature and society untenable; and yet it also retains nostalgia for that very distinction. Through technology, science and markets, the species-life of humans is now so entangled with the planet’s biogeochemical systems that that life is no longer simply biological. Rather, it has an agency that is both geological and molecular. The Anthropocene supplies a vivid presentation of the entanglements—of the naturecultures, of the global hybrids—that are climate change, soil modification, ocean acidification and so on. Yet it is a formulation that would seem to be shadowed by a longing for that which its emergence signals is lost: Man and Nature.

The transition from the Holocene to the Anthropocene can be posed as one in which nature in its geological dimension, which was once assumed (by in large) to be a dense, reliable background to human activity, has now become so saturated by that activity that this nature itself can now explode in catastrophe at any moment (Žižek, In Defence 435) As scientists of the Anthropocene demonstrate,

---

7 For examples of this thesis see Sachs, Common Wealth and ‘Survival’; Friedman.
human activity has already caused the critical thresholds to a number of the Earth’s biogeochemical systems to be crossed. With the possibility of abrupt climate change, ocean anoxic events, and a global mass extinction event, they warn the earth system rests on the edge of chaos (Rockström et al.). Yet responses to this situation seem to proceed not only as if the distinction between Society and Nature persists, but as if it is this division that must be preserved if calamity is to be averted.

This, it might be contended, has produced two broad strategies of purification by which humanity might be relieved of the Anthropocene’s monstrous hybridity. On the one hand, the romantic retreat. This demands that we must leave the nonhumans alone; we’ve gone too far, we must withdraw—if we are to ‘return to safety’ and avoid the wrath of James Lovelock’s Gaia (see Latour, ‘Will Non-Humans?’). On the other, enlightened administration. This asserts Man’s sovereignty over Nature and recalls notions of human mastery central to the epistemological and political imaginaries of the Enlightenment. This position is exemplified by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, instigators of the term Anthropocene, when they appeal for the ‘wise application of knowledge … to guide mankind towards global, sustainable, environmental management’ (Crutzen and Stoermer). This is a position strikingly encapsulated in the title of Mark Lynas’s recent book, God Species.

However, the Anthropocene designates a predicament in which the distinction on which such strategies rest has lost its purchase. Neither the prospect of the abyss nor the progress of reason can compel the restitution of environmental order. Both would seem to misunderstand their object. For in one sense the catastrophe has already happened: Nature has ended, Man is dead. This is so in that the opposition which would define the human against the natural world is redundant in a context in which the human is now irrevocably folded into the Earth’s systems. Here it would seem the Anthropocene is but the ultimate confirmation of Raymond Williams’ observation made decades ago: in ‘this actual world there is … not much point in counterposing or restating the great abstractions of Man and Nature’ (83); for, as he continues, ‘We have mixed our labour with the earth, our forces with its forces too deeply to be able to draw back and separate either out’ (83). More recently climatologist Mike Hulme made the point thus with regard to global warming: ‘It is as irrelevant as it is impossible to find the invisible fault line between natural and artificial climate’ (‘Cosmopolitan Climate’ 270). In another sense, to persist as if we live before this catastrophe is to be nostalgic in the full meaning of that word. It is to express

---

8 Of the nine planetary boundaries established three have already been crossed, those of climate change, rate of biodiversity loss and the nitrogen cycle (See Rockström et al.).
a longing for that which never was. For the distinction between the social and natural worlds, as Latour, Haraway and others have long made clear, was always already a modern conceit.

V.

*The Anthropocene hails Earthlings:* There is an ‘element of indecision’ that would seem to be contained in the notion of the Anthropocene. As Bronislaw Szerszynski succinctly puts it, ‘is this the epoch of the apotheosis, or of the erasure, of the human as the master and end of nature?’ (16). This ambivalence would seem to be a condition for the bifurcation between mastery and retreat: between calls to proceed with the assurance of the God species’ faith in modernization and its emancipatory promise, and calls to retreat in the wake of modernity’s broken pledges and unintended consequences (cf., for example, Lovelock’s call for a new Dunkirk in the War on Gaia (150)). However underpinning both promises for omnipresent mastery and pleas for retreat in the face of a vengeful Goddess is a commitment to detachment. That is, through mastery or retreat such proposals would seek to free humans from the obligations, or from the consequences, that the limits of Nature would impose on them. With god-like powers or retreating from godly powers, humans, it seems, are to detach themselves from Nature, from Earth: disciplining it into their obedient servant, or fleeing from its punishment, as if it were an avenging angel.

Latour has contrasted two grand narratives of modernity: freedom and attachment. The first is derived from the modern conception of the separation of Nature and Society, where human mastery over nature, via the intermediary of modern science and technology, is conceived as the advance toward greater emancipation. The second narrative, attachment, posits that science, technology, markets and so on ‘have amplified, for at least the last two centuries, not only the scale at which humans and nonhumans are connecting with one another in larger and larger assemblies, but also the intimacy with which such connections are made’ (Latour, ‘It’s Development’ 5). All the while convinced by the narrative of modernization and emancipation, moderns ‘rendered more and more explicit the fragility of the life support systems that make … [their] “spheres of existence” possible’ (Latour, ‘It’s Development’ 3).

The Anthropocene is nothing if not ‘the ultimate learning experience’ of the fragility of the systems on which such spheres depend (Latour, ‘It’s Development’ 39): where the ‘tight coupling’ of human and earth systems render the air, sea, soil and DNA no longer matters of fact, but matters of concern. With a growing awareness of the proliferation of such hybrid naturecultures, Latour
contends, we have ‘shifted to another period’ away from one of modernization and emancipation to ‘one of explicitation and of attachment’ (Latour, ‘It’s Development’ 3; italics in original).9

To name the subject of this new narrative, which is no longer one of mastery or retreat, but one of attachment, dependency and responsibility, Latour has turned to the terminology of science fiction. With nowhere else to go, it is ‘Earthlings’ who must live on this planet, without the promise of progress, but with the prospect of progressive change by which a world in common can come to be composed. It is in this sense, then, that the Anthropocene comes to hail neither the God species nor Gaia’s assailants, but Earthlings.

VI.

The Anthropocene—an emerging apparatus: The development of earth system science and its corollary, earth system governance, comes to posit its target, the Anthropocene, in an empirics and an informatics that establishes it at once as an autonomous object of knowledge—‘a single earth system’; and, as a field of intervention, through which ‘the co-evolution of human and natural systems’ are to be managed ‘in a way that secures the sustainable development of human society’ (Biermann 4).10 Through this emerging apparatus the Anthropocene is subject to two intimately connected processes: its financialization and its augmentation.

Much of the intellectual labour invested in earth system science prepares the planet’s ecological systems for the market; supplying an informatics by which they are to be established as various stocks and services integral to the global economy. As Timothy Luke writes: ‘Earth System Science aspires to scan and appraise the most productive use of … [the] resourcified flows of energy, information, and matter as well as the sinks, dumps, and wastelands for all the by-

9 ‘Explicitation’ is a term that Latour borrows from Peter Sloterdijk.
10 The most developed of these is the proposal for earth system governance. See <http://www.earthsystemgovernance.org>. This seeks to articulate the knowledge of earth system science into a global administrative regime that offers ‘global stewardship and strategies for Earth System management’. This project was inaugurated with the Declaration on Global Change (2001) (see <http://www.essp.org/index.php?id=41>). In 2001 four bodies of the international scientific community investigating processes of ‘global change’ convened in Amsterdam. There, representatives of the Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP), the International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change (IHDP), the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP) and the International Biodiversity Programme (Diversitas) adopted the Declaration (see Steffen et al.). The Declaration contended: ‘Basic goods and services supplied by the planetary life support system, such as food, water, clean air and an environment conducive to human health, are being affected increasingy by global change. … The global change programmes are committed to working closely with other sectors of society and across all nations and cultures to meet the challenge of a changing Earth … [and to establish] deliberate strategies of good management that sustain the Earth’s environment while meeting social and economic development objectives’.
products that commercial products leave behind’ (‘Developing’ 133). Ecological flows thus come to be discursively framed and institutionally managed as the ‘terrestrial infrastructure for global capital’ (Luke, ‘Eco-Managerialism’ 106). No longer an externality of the modern industrial economy;\textsuperscript{11} rather, via this environmental accountancy the ecological is to be folded into market relations. Integral here are the risk technologies of finance capital. Futures, derivatives, hedge funds, reinsurance instruments and so on come to figure the contingencies of ecological circulation as an opportunity for profit, commodifying its risk into an abstract universal form to be traded (see LiPuma and Lee; Bryan and Rafferty). Through catastrophe bonds, weather derivatives and other financial instruments advanced by the World Bank, IMF and the secondary insurance industry,\textsuperscript{12} the ecological contingencies that unevenly threaten capital’s infrastructure are decoded as such, and recoded as financial risk, which, in turn, is distributed across global capital markets (Cooper ‘Economies’; Pryke).\textsuperscript{13} The emerging apparatus of the Anthropocene signals an increasingly thorough folding of ecology and economy, to which the financialization of the earth system is central.

Initiatives seeking the modification of the circulation of biophysical materials—of compounds and codes—within the earth system have been signalled as a ‘strategic issue’ in a report on earth system governance. It asks, ‘what are the options and caveats for technological fixes like geo-engineering and genetic modification’ for managing the earth system? (GAIM 1, cited in Lövbrand et al. 11). This formally puts questions of terraforming and areoforming on the table as modalities for augmenting life in the Anthropocene:\textsuperscript{14} as potential strategies for reducing the vulnerabilities and enhancing the capacities of the global species-body through engineering the planet’s physical systems, so as, for example, ‘to “optimize” climate’ (by injecting the planet’s atmosphere with solar deflecting aerosols) (Crutzen); or through engineering its biochemistry so as to design forms of life that can ‘survive and thrive’ in the new ecologies of the Anthropocene (Nordhaus and Shellenberger 253). The case for the former has most recently been put forward by a report published by the Royal Society, *Geo-Engineering: Giving us time to act?* (2009). This argues that international scientific and policy communities need to be prepared for the possibility that geo-engineering will be the pre-emption necessary to complement global change strategies of mitigation and adaptation.\textsuperscript{15} In terms of the latter, the

\textsuperscript{11} Cf., for example, Stern’s contention that climate change represents historically, the most significant ‘market failure’—one demanding rapid correction if catastrophic tipping points are to be averted.

\textsuperscript{12} See, for examples, ‘News release: World’s first humanitarian insurance policy issued’ and ‘Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility’.

\textsuperscript{13} These sentences draw on Dibley and Neilson (148-149).

\textsuperscript{14} On the beginnings of these terms in works of science fiction see Murphy.

\textsuperscript{15} As one pundit put it, geo-engineering it would seem is ‘a bad idea whose time has come’. See ‘Geo-engineering’. See also Kintisch. On geo-engineering and the politics of pre-emption see Cooper, ‘Pre-empting’. 
bioengineering of ‘plants to survive desertification, altered climate zones, and changes in rainfall patterns’ is underway (Murphy 56). However, it is with synthetic biology, where proposed designer bacteria will release global modernity from its ecological predicament, that the extravagant promise of the tech fix lies; that is, with the invention of new organisms that will siphon vast volumes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere or will generate enormous amounts of ‘green energy’.16 ‘We are going to start domesticating bacteria to process stuff inside enclosed reactors to produce energy in a far more clean and efficient manner.’ We are, genomic futurist Juan Enriquez continues, at ‘the beginning stage of being able to program life’ (cited in Specter). This is the domain famously associated with the venture capitalist, Craig Venter.

The emerging apparatus of the Anthropocene, then, signals a mutation in life: no longer simply biological, life is now both geological and molecular. Concomitantly, it is along these dimensions that life itself becomes increasingly subsumed by capital in the thoroughgoing privatization of the shared elements of our species-being. Such a world, in which the geo- and bio-engineered augmentations of life are directed by the rule of capital, is one destined to be increasingly divided, as Mike Davis (‘Living’) warns, between the ‘Earth’s first-class passengers’ ensconced in ‘green and gated oases’ and the dwellers of the ever burgeoning slums of the planet’s mega cities.17

VII.

*Life in the Anthropocene has no future; it has prospects:* Elaborating his *Compositionist Manifesto* in a curious piece of theory as theatre, Latour has recently re-enacted the flight of the *Angelus Novus* that Benjamin famously immortalized.18 It is a performance with a twist.

Standing before his audience, eyes staring, arms outstretched, his back to the future, Latour dramatizes our present moment as one in which the Angel, turning from the wreckage that the storm of progress piles in front of his feet, looks over his shoulder. With a dawning sense of realization he sees that it is his flight

---

16 It is estimated that it requires between fifteen and eighteen terawatts of energy to power the planet per annum. Projections for energy manufactured with the tools of synthetic biology have been estimated to have the potential to produce up to ninety terawatts. As one researcher put it, ‘we are talking about producing five times the energy we need on this planet and doing it in an environmentally benign way’ (Specter).

17 This is the ‘new apartheid’ that Žižek (In Defence 428) provocatively formalizes as global capital’s key antagonism: that between the ‘Included and Excluded’. See too Urry’s dystopic image of the unfolding ecological crisis in which the globe’s population is split between the poor, who are ruled by ‘regional warlordism’, and the rich, who are governed by ‘digital panopticism’. Davis (‘Who Will?’) has recently turned to the utopian promise of the city as the site for redressing the environmental crisis.

from the horror of the past that is the source not only of the destruction, but of the impending calamity—the ecological crisis. In reorienting this gaze, which he transposes as no longer that of the Angel, but that of altogether less ethereal creatures—we Earthlings—Latour suggests the emergence of a new relation to the future. This is, in fact, no future at all. At least, not as it was imagined by the moderns—as revolution, as utopia, as so much ‘hype’, as he puts it (An Attempt 13). Rather, it is one of the prospect, not that of Progress, but of ‘the shape of things to come’ (13). This orientation stands not as a ‘war cry’ of the vanguard of the moderns ‘to go even further and faster ahead’; but rather, as Latour continues, ‘as a warning, a call to attention, so as to stop going further in the same way as before toward the future’ (3). It is here that Latour inserts his call for the slow work of composition; of composing, of building a common world between the humans and the nonhumans that he calls cosmopolitics.

Despite the distance that Latour puts between his position and that of the moderns, it is in this commitment to the common that he acknowledges a shared concern in his manifesto with that of Marx’s and Engel’s 1848 document. However, he parts company with the earlier texts inasmuch as its politics remain exclusively the domain of the human:

compared to the total transformation of our landscape, cities, factories, transportation systems for which we will have to gird ourselves … [how] ridiculously timid does Karl Marx’s preoccupation with the mere ‘appropriation of means of production’ seem, when compared against the total metamorphosis of the entire means of production necessary to soon adjust nine billion people on a livable planet Earth? Every product, every biological species, every packaging, every consumer in excruciating detail is concerned in this, together with every river, every glacier, and every bug. (Latour, ‘It’s Development’ 9).

Estranged from their own practices, moderns have ignored such entanglements in their rush to the Future. We are now only beginning to grasp the magnitude of the ruinous consequences of this flight. If to break with its trajectory necessitates the metamorphosis of our entire means of production, this is so because we need different relations to the folding of the human and the nonhuman that capital has historically committed us to, and that have been misrepresented in the abstractions of Humanity and Nature. While the history of capital corresponds to an ever-increasing enmeshing of human and nonhuman entities at scales both planetary and molecular, the bid for human freedom—which is its promise—is one without care for these entanglements. Inasmuch as it presents a thoroughgoing acknowledgment of the inescapability of these relations, the notion of the Anthropocene brings the folding of the human into the air, into the sea, the soil and DNA to the fore as matters of concern. This at least is the lesson of the geological predicament that the moderns bequeath to us. It is a
permanent lesson. The Anthropocene is here to stay. There can be no return to the Holocene. There is no going ‘back to safety’. We cannot save Nature or humanity, ‘as it is, or was, or is supposed to have once been’ (Dyer-Witheford 7).

It is in this sense then, that life in the Anthropocene has no Future. There ‘can be no return to earth’; only the prospect of ‘recaptur[ing] the strange planet to which capital has abducted us’ (7). This, however, is not to be free at last. But dependent, attached, responsible.

Ben Dibley is a researcher and writer based in Sydney, currently working as a research associate at the Centre for Cultural Research, the University of Western Sydney. He has recent publications in the International Journal of Cultural Studies, Cultural Studies Review and New Formations.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the anonymous referees for their insightful comments from which this version of the paper has considerably benefited. For its remaining inadequacies he alone bears responsibility.

Works Cited


Sigmundsson, Freysteinn et al. ‘Climate effects on volcanism: influence on magmatic systems of loading and unloading from ice mass variations, with examples from Iceland.’ *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* 368 (2010): 2519-2534.


Later, climate change will also bring with it problems to do with political time and historical time in particular, and in a political culture that has now spent several centuries defining its aims in historical and narrative terms, this will be a revolution, a painstakingly slow one, but a revolution none the less. Given the importance of the concept of justice—whether defined in terms of constitutional legitimacy, institutional legality or social equality—in orienting the way that political aims are defined, the question becomes how will justice be defined and explained in a world where the conditions of physical, social, economic, national and global life are being radically re-configured into something altogether different?

This is one of the questions Nigel Clark explores in his book *Inhuman Nature: Sociable Life on a Dynamic Planet* specifically in a chapter entitled ‘Justice and Abrupt Climate Change’. Clark’s general argument is to challenge recent deconstructions of the human/nature dichotomy which do not show sufficient awareness of the ‘radical asymmetry’ of the relationship between the human and nature (see chapter 2). It is too simple to see the material future we now face as one in which various integrated or hybridised natural/human complexes will recondition everything. The future will not simply be post-human in the sense that everything will have been radically mediated by human definition, representation, exploitation or pollution. Our physical context will always remain in massive excess of our actions in ways that we have only been dimly aware of for half a century. Clark writes:

> Without an earth and its envelope of life, without a galaxy, a solar system and the ceaseless energy of the sun, human existence would be
nothing. Without our species, the earth would still pulse with life and the sun would pump out light and heat, heedless and unperturbed. This is the bottom line of human being: we are utterly dependent on an earth and cosmos that is, to a large degree, indifferent to us. (50)

Clark is therefore interested in thinkers who embrace this radical asymmetry, Georges Bataille being the obvious example. To Bataille, ‘we are inescapably exposed to the most violent, perturbing forces of the cosmos’ (22). Bataille’s thought has, in turn, become a ‘staple’ (22) of post-structuralist thinking, which embraces the idea that the ‘systems we compose for ourselves can neither be closed at their beginning nor at their end—and are thus destined to be perpetually energized and animated by their outside’ (22). In turn, detecting the logic of asymmetry in post-structuralist thought leads to an ethical construction of asymmetry in the form of Derrida’s thinking of the gift that is so unconditional we can never know it ontologically.

How does this work out in relation to the issue of justice and climate change? Clark argues that the re-configuration of human thinking about justice that will be forced on us by climate change will require unprecedented adaptation. He writes that the ‘mapping of vulnerability to global heating onto existing contours of socio-economic inequality presents arguably the greatest challenge for social justice humankind has ever faced’ (109). There is no ‘binding decision-making mechanism’ (108) to determine how the rampant behaviour of one section of the human population has had impacts on the lives of another. We cannot simply apply familiar and conventional ways of thinking to the injustices that will arise in a climate change world. This issue is complicated by the fact that we cannot just rely on simple models of cause and effect to track the sequence from exploitative behaviour to unlivable consequence. Science is only now beginning to grapple with the asymmetry of cause and effect dynamics in climactic systems:

Once we concede that there are effects way out of proportion to any cause, and that such wildly disproportionate determinations are inherent to the way climate operates with or without any human input, the very ground on which an equitable accounting might take place begins to buckle and slide. Dynamical processes come into visibility that potentially exceed the reach of social negotiation and contestability: that resist any possibility of being done differently or even being known with confidence. (109–10)

This asymmetry presents challenges to the current attempt to define a carbon-aware global economy around stable ‘generalizable units of value’ (113), specifically carbon itself (114). Instead we are confronting ‘a material reality in which tomorrow’s emission of a tonne of carbon dioxide might have consequences
utterly different from yesterday’s tonne: a world which most emphatically does not play by the rules of universal equivalence’ (115). This will be a world where our climato-political future will develop not in terms of the patient unfolding of a series of measured events, but suddenly and abruptly in terms of violent unpredictable interruptions and unanticipated tipping points.

This economic and political asymmetry, like the cosmic one mentioned above, also leads Clark to Bataille. Clark now extends Bataille’s discussion of the multiply compounding non-self-identity of bound and boundless cosmic energies (see Bataille) to far less literal models of the asymmetrical. This is where the Derridean gift comes into the argument:

What arrives by way of asymmetrical causation comes as a gift, or a bequeathal or an inheritance rather than an exchange, with all the perilous promise that attends those offerings whose origin and final destination are beyond our grasp. (52)

This passage is laden with terms – gift, inheritance, promise – that each has a loaded meaning in Derrida’s detailed treatment of this subject in Given Time 1: Counterfeit Money. In this work, Derrida distinguishes between, on the one hand, an economy of exchange, built on the reciprocal and logical transfer of one thing for another in a daylight world of symmetrical evaluation, and, on the other, the gift, the outgoing of a generosity so primitive and transcendent of value, that it is not only unacknowledged, but even unknown to those potentially situated by it. The gift is a much discussed concept in the secondary literature on Derrida and beyond, but its logic has to be seen as definitively and constitutively extraordinary, despite its over-assimilation to simple ethical and even political prejudices. In short, it is a volatile and enduringly, even insistently, difficult concept.

This thinking of the gift is then read back into Bataille’s idea of an irreducible and entropic excess as unfolding in and through all movements of energy. Clark starts to read this excess morally as the advocacy, or at least the celebration of a generosity neglected in the Western tradition. He characterises Bataille’s thought as an encouragement of ‘a magnanimous, non-utilitarian unloading of wealth … [which] has so few precedents in modern Western thought’ (131). He goes on:

True gifts, [Bataille] insists, arrive from beyond the closed circuit of exchange and calculation, and do not expect a return. … Such gestures are a continuity of the exorbitant energy of the sun, a perpetuation of the monstrous outpouring of solar energy – on a more intimate scale. … Paroxysms of generosity go with the flow of the world’s tumultuousness, by operating on the same immoderate but discontinuous terrain. They
prevent the dangerous amassing of energy or productive potential, not deliberately, but as the fortuitous side-effects of acts worth doing purely for their own sake. In this way—incidentally, secretly, joyfully—the gift subverts the logic of enclosure and accumulation. (131)

Clark detects that behind much green thinking, there is a ‘will to generosity and discharge’ (133) that rhymes with Bataille’s thought. This asymmetrical logic of giving could function as a model for relinquishing the economic self-seeking that remains an obstacle to resolute consensual action on climate change. Kiribati, one of the world’s nations most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, has already provided an example of such generosity in its offer to allocate a huge proportion of its territorial waters to a marine park (135). Clark argues that it is this kind of gesture that could become an example to the wealthy who are most responsible for climate change, encouraging them to relinquish their self-interest in a context in which self-interest now seems to involve almost inconceivable levels of risk.

In another shift to Derrida, Clark connects this thinker of the excess of the gift to justice, which in Derrida, is also understood as irreducibly excessive. Before turning to the Derridean concept of justice, however, it is worth making a couple of points about Bataille, and the consequences of Bataille’s thought for Derrida. Clark acknowledges that Bataille has been critiqued for the way in which his thought ‘could slip into an apologetic for selfishness and violence’ (134), but this is not Clark’s current concern. He returns immediately to considering Bataille’s ‘concern with redistributing global wealth’ (134). Bataille’s violence, however, should not be underestimated, not because it can be detected as the insistent yet concealed unconscious of his thought, some consequence he was too careless to realise, and too pre-occupied to rationalise. In fact, Bataille was consciously and determinedly a thinker of violence, and there was a place for it everywhere in his philosophy. Bataille’s thought is a thought of the perpetual undoing of systems, of how every institution – in the broadest sense of the word as any constituted thing – however petty, arises only in the context of its potential to be violated. It violates itself even in and as its own self-forming. It is always oriented to a great undoing that is irreversible and irremediable. Every identity and value in Bataille forms only in its own un-forming. The moral critique of Bataille interprets this thinking of universal self-violation as a kind of advocacy or celebration on Bataille’s part, but this is a mis-reading. Bataille cannot advocate violence because that would require his committing to the pretence that some stable valuation can be resolutely and enduringly formulated. If all values form only in their un-forming, the violence is not something to recommend. It is simply inevitable. In short, the trans-valuation of all values cannot become a value without betraying itself.
This principle applies to the logic of the gift, a term so easily misunderstood because of the very word’s benign connotations. The giving Bataille celebrates is a perpetual violation of all identities, part of the drive to dissipation, extinction, evacuation and chaos detectable in the movement of all energies. It cannot be used for better or for worse, and above all, cannot be programmatic: it cannot be directed towards a preferred result. Its consequences are unpredictable and random. It certainly cannot be assimilated to an act of a person, either individual or corporate.

This is made emphatic in Derrida. The gift is not simply something to prefer to exchange. The gift is what makes exchange possible by opening the possibility of all movement. The movement of the gift is unstoppable, but can only instantiate itself in events that Derrida identifies as ‘economic’. The economic realises and enacts the gift by materialising it in the form of an exchange between subjects: the translation of things between persons. Yet, without the opening of the possibility of movement that is the gift, no economic exchange would be possible. Similarly, the unstoppable energy of the gift remains latent in every economic event, instilling it with a kind of irreducible potential for entropy. In other words, the logic of the gift involves the immanence in the economic act of a momentum that will always have the potential to bring any stable, structured economic relationship undone in its movement towards yet another economic event, and so on indefinitely. I have written elsewhere of how Bataillean this logic is in Derrida (see Mansfield) recalling as it does the complex inter-relationship, the imbrication of what Bataille calls the restricted in the general economies, a paradigm of insistent non-self-identity. But this relationship is far less literal in Derrida, less about literal material economies than it is about the possibilities of human events in general, simultaneously enclosed in pragmatic instances and open to disestablishment and inevitable un-rule. The gift is not a style of act, therefore, as much as the possibility of acts in general that is both necessary to the incipience of events and the thing that threatens their durable institution. It both allows events and violates them, giving rise to but always promising to bring undone anything we put in place. The gift in the Derridean sense should not be mistaken for or simply conflated with what we understand in our daily lives as giving: the benign offering to others of what we have, and that we think they might like. Such a giving is a style of economic act, requiring the Derridean gift, as what we recognise in retrospect as always having come before. The Derridean gift does not exist. In Given Time, almost every reference to the gift is followed by the phrase ‘if there is any’ (see, for example, Derrida, Given Time 7) or something similar. The gift lacks ontology, and although it allows subjectivity, it always precedes it, inciting it but not yet taking place as an episode of benign exchange of a knowable thing between already existing subjects.
Why dwell on the nuances of Derridean theory in this context, when it is clear what Clark means? Two reasons: firstly, because Clark translates this discussion of Bataillean generosity into one of the Derridean gift in order to evoke the Derridean conception of justice, where the same theoretical problem arises, which has consequences for his discussion of climate change justice. And, secondly, because it is not enough to think in terms of generosity as an inspiring principle of generalised largesse. The gift is nothing in and of itself. In the same way that Heideggerean Being is nothing, even as it gives rise to all beings, which are the only way in which Being can be realised and known, the Derridean gift only emerges in the economic events which it gives rise to and threatens to undo. In other words, the hyperbolic generosity that Clark appeals to is nothing. It can only be enacted in the economic events generosity in Clark is assumed to spurn. Basically, we still need a plan. The fact that Clark does not develop his generosity beyond the largely gestural shows it doesn’t achieve much in and as itself.

Yet, surely, even if generosity may not provide an exact program, isn’t it a valuable way to orient ourselves? This returns us to the reference in Clark to Derrida’s discussion of justice (133–34). In Derrida, justice is what gives rise to systems of law or right (Derrida’s word is droit, which has both meanings). Systems of law always come into place in reference to something larger than them, which they try to fulfil, the thing that orients and motivates them: justice. Justice is in the same relationship with droit that the gift is to the economic: it allows it to arise, is what droit always refers to in each and every one of its events, and it is what inevitably undoes droit by making it recognise its inadequacies, the fact that it is never just enough, that it always needs renewing, moderation, interpretation, reform. It is the principle of the doing and undoing of droit. This means that justice both institutes and violates droit. It allows it and brings it undone in its ever onward march to improvement, to a greater, newer, more equitable, free, open and beneficent polis. In its violation of droit, however, it is never less than violent, and the canonical treatment of the theme of justice in Derrida, the essay ‘Force of Law: the Mystical Foundations of Authority’ ends by being largely a discussion of violence, through a reading of Walter Benjamin’s famously confronting essay ‘Critique of Violence’. Clark acknowledges this: ‘[A] notion of the just’, he writes, ‘which embodies a “responsibility without limits” … Derrida concedes, is also dangerous’ (134). This excessive justice risks allowing styles of injustice and irresponsibility. Clark interprets this in an odd way, one that involves a reflection back on his own argument. According to Clark, the kind of injustice Derrida ‘concedes’ as a risk is one where the commitment to asymmetrical styles of thinking would connect with the insight into the asymmetrical relationship between the human and nature, and thus diminish human responsibility for environmental destruction by insisting that human impact will always be infinitesimally small on a cosmic scale. There is the risk
of a kind of intellectualism here, where the asymmetrical model of physical reality and asymmetrical philosophies of what could be called, in general terms, the relationship between the unconditional and ipseity (see Derrida, *Rogues*) are identified with one another and seen to combine to risk the same mistakes. As I argued above, the mediating complex here is the Bataillean logic of cosmic economies of energy, which Bataille at least reads both literally and philosophically. Yet, it is a mistake to conflate the style of excess Derrida sees in and as justice with the material vastness of the cosmos, and even with the planet’s literal material excess over the human. *Pace* Bataille, it is an extraordinary leap of faith to assume there is such a theory of everything.

The re-appropriation of justice in Derrida is not the result of cynical manipulation. The re-appropriability of justice is implicit in its violence. Justice kills even as it frees. The gift ruins, even as it makes. It destroys even the logic of generosity that would seem to be its primary denomination. We cannot live in a world of the gift, nor one of justice, even as these institute our possibilities of acting inter-subjectively and in some relationship to right. We must then have a program. The program will assume the gift and justice, but will be threatened by them as well, even as it attempts to instantiate them. This is why in the end, Derridean political theory must be a kind of decisionism, and why Derrida has written so extensively on that high-priest of decisionism, Carl Schmitt. What opens behind the gift and justice is the pre-world (for want of a better term to describe that which pre-exists terms altogether) beyond knowability and calculability that is the unconditionality and indeterminability from which all ipseities – from things to identities – arise and to which they refer. Yet, this pre-world is not livable. Things do not happen there, because it does not exist. Its existence only ever takes the form of the pressure towards re-making in the made. Things that happen, therefore, arise in relation to that which is indeterminate, incalculable and unknowable. Every institution must take place in relation to what undoes it, and there is nothing other than these institutions without absolute ground, which are always destined to be undone. Any knowledge must take place in the context of the unknowable. Any calculation must take place in relation to the incalculable. Human acts involve then the postulation of a program in relation to that which undoes all programs. Some person, at some point, must make a decision in the midst of this unknowability, and take responsibility for it. ‘There must be decision’, Derrida writes (*Negotiations* 31). What distinguishes Derridean from Schmittian decisionism is Derrida’s insistent deconstruction of sovereignty, in terms of both the insistence on the fragility and questionability of the decision, and the concomitant refusal to identify the person who decides with an authoritarian individual, or, in fact, an individual at all.

The consequences of Derridean thought therefore are that, yes, whatever program we implement must take place in relation to the open deconstructive
impetus of justice and the gift, but cannot simply be justice or the gift. It must involve the institution of acts by way of a deconstructive decision for which some (probably collective) person must take responsibility. This taking responsibility is a kind of sovereignty, but not the unquestionable and arbitrary authority of Schmitt, vested in a supreme individual, who interrupts the rational texture of civil society by a kind of mystical and charismatic ultimacy. It is an unstable authority instituted in the events that both enact and open the question of its legitimacy. It is a collective authority but one always open to being questioned. That sounds like government. And democracy. Derrida’s theory of government then is one of decisions to be made in the context of indeterminability. Derridean decisionism is a model of government as a distinctive act, built on open-ended responsibility. It is a call to recover the distinctive and active responsibility of government itself.

***

So we must have a program oriented by justice and the gift, but what will our program be? How will we determine what is right? How will we decide how justice will be manifest? I now want to turn to Colin Dayan’s *The Law is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons*, because it offers a topical and contemporary way into some of these issues. *The Law is a White Dog* is a book about the ways in which the law constructs and then enforces certain categories of legal and civic exclusion. Key amongst these are forms of racial vilification, in Dayan’s arguments, always and only understood, or at least filtered through the specific US experience of race. It is a peculiarly US-centric book, without ever really arguing why it should be. This is the first of a series of theoretical blind-spots which affect the book’s argument, and which I will refer to in passing. This is a particularly important thing to note, because Dayan depends on a linear model of historical time, an idiosyncratic one, for sure, but a linear model nonetheless, an understanding of time most identified and most the result of the ambition to deal with time in terms of the imagined, directed history of national groups. Dayan connects with this kind of national historical time because her interest is in systems of law, normally defined in relation to national jurisdictions, but also because her politics is one of social exclusion, which can only be defined in relation to a relatively strictly defined polis of one kind or another, in this case, the United States. At a crucial point in her argument, where she attempts to use metaphor as a way of bringing together various strands of law, she writes: ‘no country kills more dogs or imprisons more people than the United States’ (218). A problem with this statement is the obscure nature of its undisclosed model of social connectivity. It diagnoses a collective social phenomenon, linking two separate practices. Their inter-relationship must depend on some invisible connecting medium that must link practices in dog-management with policing. This medium is usually called
culture, a term used to help us think through the means of infection that causes an impulse at one point in the field of social behavior to re-emerge at another. Yet, the shape of this field (its limits, forms and varying zones of intensity) and its means of transmission (its motivating energies and song-lines) are unknown and perhaps unknowable, and this needs somehow to be addressed, even in the most usual way it is proposed (as national, whatever that might mean). The slippage between correlation and identity is a repeated problem in Dayan's book, which relies heavily on metaphor and analogy as a short-cut to truth. This is a kind of argumentative enthusiasm that is half-self-conscious. In a late discussion of the parallels between dog law and segregation (243–6), she almost seems to apologise for it. However self-conscious it may seem, however, Dayan's reliance on metaphor never develops a fully-fledged account of metaphor nor does it refer to thinkers who've exhaustively investigated metaphor as a problem (Derrida, again). However, for my own purposes here, my interest is not in metaphor, but with time, and I dwell on the issue of the nation and its concomitant understanding of time because it is the issue of the neat out-flowing of historical time as conceived in this way that will, I hope, advance my argument about what kinds of justice and right we are now in the business of contriving in our early political responses to climate change.

But first, what is Dayan's core argument? At the centre of *The Law is a White Dog* is the argument that contemporary legal practices are continuous with earlier religious or spiritual assumptions or prejudices that still govern the way legal decisions are made. Dayan writes: 'I try to show how the ghosts of Enlightenment past become the demons of modernity. I also suggest how what we call supernatural or think of as ghostly is really quite natural, corporeal, easily cast as reasonable' (xiii). To Dayan, the assumptions about animality, responsibility, identity and property that still determine legal outcomes are the unrevised legacy of older, still un-interrogated beliefs. Here, a slippage between different categories of being allows various types of outsiders to be understood in terms of one another:

what is the design of the juridical no-man's-land that has been created when law loosens the link between human beings, animals, devils, other noxious creatures, or infernal vexations? I have cast this traffic and transplantation of persons across vast social, temporal, and spatial distances in the drama of rituals that are both penal and religious. The stuff of spiritual life becomes the raw material of legal authority. (25)

Two crucial things: firstly to confirm the point about Dayan's history, but secondly her construction of injustice. Firstly, the argument is avowedly un-historical. Contemporary practices simply continue what has gone before across disparate historical periods: 'I examine the poor treatment, the entombing of the living, not as historical contingency, but as something culturally inevitable
in that the past haunts us’ (xvi). The nuances and specificities of the historical moment in its coarse and obscure over-determination are occluded for the sake of an insistence on certain modes of connection and continuity. This is another example of an insistence on connectedness despite the lack of a model of how this might come about or of the processes by which we identify and then substantiate the correlations between two different things. The history here is deeply un-historical, therefore: the assertion of the truth of the argument is more important than its substantiation. Relying as it does on homology and pronounced connectedness, its logic remains fundamentally literary. This literariness is exemplified in the reliance on the trope of the ghost as a way of representing the process of continuity. The religious past haunts the legal present, yet there is no extended discussion of what haunting might mean. There is, in short, no theory of haunting. To have a theory of haunting might seem a ridiculous requirement but what a theory of haunting might be, I will return to in (yet!) another excursus through Derrida.

The second issue is Dayan’s understanding of justice. Dayan seems to approach justice only indirectly, by way of assumed, and highly romanticised classes of injustice. Injustice (not her word) is understood fundamentally as exclusion. Dayan is interested in categories of the ‘oppressed and outlawed’ (xiii) or ‘the unloved, unwanted and abandoned’ (35). She writes:

Human materials are remade and persons are undone in the sanctity of the courtroom. Whether slaves, dead bodies, criminals, ghost detainees, or any one of the many spectral entities held in limbo in the no-man’s-lands sustained by state power, they all remain subject to the undue influences and occult revelations of law’s rituals. (12)

Slaves, criminals and the prisoners of Abu Ghrab are all examples of excluded social categories that have been subjected to the same legal oppressions, an oppression that animals, specifically dogs have also suffered. Law operates on the living by way of ‘exclusionary practices’ (41). I have no objection to an argument that draws attention to the injustices suffered by the people listed. On the contrary, the more emphatic and thorough the indictment of such practices the better. The first step might be to connect the thinking about social exclusion that’s going on here with the lively discussions of the paradoxes and aporias of social exclusion that developed in the last decade around the work of Agamben (in Dayan’s bibliography but not discussed). When Dayan writes: ‘In rereading the claims of civil death into the history of slavery and incarceration, we recognize the continuum between being judged a felon, being declared dead in law, and being made a slave’, (46) or ‘colonial legal history reveals how the construction of race (and its partner, racial stigmatization) served as the ideological fulcrum that allowed a penal society to produce a class of citizens who are dead in law: stripped of community, bereft of humanity’ (49), we are
close to Agamben’s *homo sacer*, the social actor included by way of its exclusion. The argument around Agamben’s thinking here is long and complex, but suffice it to say it goes way beyond what Dayan offers. I’m not saying this from a dogmatic loyalty to Agamben’s argument, far from it, or from the insistence that a book written in terms of one paradigm would have been better if only it had been written in terms of another. Agamben has developed the Arendtian dimension of Dayan’s thinking well beyond where Dayan chooses to go, and her case needed to think that trajectory through. Even better than a thorough thinking of what exclusion might mean would be an argument that located such practices not in a national/cultural context but in relation to the dynamics of global economic and political power. It is these complex and obscure dynamics that scholarly thinking invested in the nation can neither explain nor withstand. A logic of exclusion is not an account of injustice. It is not sufficient. Exclusion is at best symptomatic. Injustice, in short, has to be situated to be understood.

***

Tom Cohen argues forcefully for a recognition that a climate change future can only be dealt with through a thinking of non-linear time, and Clark’s arguments about asymmetrical causation and the asymmetry of the nature/human relationship propose the same thing. The simple national chronological time in Dayan’s account of an exclusionary injustice does not help us here then. I want to propose, however, that it is in thinking through another account of one of the most important tropes in Dayan’s argument that we can go some of the way towards understanding where our thinking about justice in a climate change context is now heading. This trope is the ghost, and the account I mean is the one in Derrida’s discussion of Marx in the book *Spectres of Marx*.

Climate change proposes to us a set of problems to do with the living conditions of human societies. The term itself misleads us in its singularity, for climate change will not be experienced as an event or a crisis, even though it may precipitate crises. It will unfold over a long, perhaps indefinite, period of time in a set of complex political events which will compound one with another to produce complexes made up of institutional adaptations, cultural manifestations and political eruptions. These events will re-activate older political formations, the economic stratifications, international tensions and racial imaginings that still represent our maximum points of vulnerability to violent fracture. Climate change, in other words, will produce long-term, multiple and complex events which will be experienced politically. This politics will lead to episodes of sudden change and the development of surprising connections, between peoples, ideas and identities. Those who are now vulnerable will become more so, and many who are now secure will discover how small the margin for error in their particular context might actually be. The reason why the climate change future must be thought of in relation to non-linear time is partly because, as
Clark explains, climactic developments must be understood in terms of sudden eruptions, tipping points and an always possible shocking disproportion between cause and effect. The past will reach into the future in surprising and disjunctive ways, that will not be disconnected from the political structures and inequities we have produced, but will re-animate and re-configure them unpredictably. In this fraught political environment, even the kind of large-scale unilateral acts of generosity Clark recommends will simply be nice gestures, but not real political action. Such gestures interrupt politics in potentially emphatic ways, but they do not allow for the ongoing adaptation of human collective action to circumstances that will be required, that is, in fact, always required.

A simple model of linear time with its disavowed inheritances, as we have seen in Dayan, represents a very conventional modelling of history according to a national social logic, but it is broadly unadaptable to a political logic in which national continuities are the idiosyncracies of an artificially circumscribed polis, whose boundaries cannot be neatly or simply drawn.

We need therefore to be able to understand political time in relation to sudden disruptions, that are surprising re-configurations of past structures and events. In Dayan, the ghost functions as a trope for the irrational nature of the prejudices that persist in supposedly modern legal practices. They represent a continuity in legal culture that belies its claims to being the rational administration of defensible and transparent principles. I have mentioned above how one of the problems with Dayan’s book is that it advances on certain terms while seemingly oblivious to the extensive discussions that have proliferated around these terms: the extensive and even self-conscious use of metaphor without investigating the problematisation of metaphor in Derrida; the reliance on models of social exclusion, without considering the way the aporias of social inclusion and exclusion as they have been considered by Agamben; an elaborate investigation of subjectification in prisons without a detailed analysis of Foucault (again in the bibliography, but not discussed). A further example of this is the detailed use of the trope of haunting as a way of imagining historical time without looking at the obvious example of where this issue has been most thoroughly analysed, in relation to the most considered and influential Western models of historico-political time in Derrida’s reading of Marx in *Spectres of Marx*.

In *Spectres*, Derrida uses the trope of the ghost to critique the very idea of the linear unfolding of time. In a loaded statement, he writes that the ghost ‘begins by coming back’ (11). It comes to us as ever new and disruptive, shocking and disconcerting, destroying the neat homologies and continuities around which we have structured our practices and identities. Yet even in this radical and disruptive novelty, it is returning from the past. It comes through the future towards us, but out of the past. It unsettles the simple logics of linear historical time, therefore, by confronting us with the ever new future crises that are the
forgotten or disguised residues of the past. This unsettling of historical time exposes us to the history that is the future, but always as disruption, not as mere result, or simple continuity. This persistence of the unresolved has a clear political meaning for Derrida, who connects a disjunctive understanding of time with inherited, insistent injustices:

No justice … seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some responsibility, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism. Without this non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who are not there, of those who are no longer or are not yet present and living, what sense would there be to ask the question ‘where?’ ‘where tomorrow?’ ‘whither?’ (xix)

This justice as the unclosable open-ness to the other is the justification for Clark’s recourse to an open-ended generosity as possible political ethos in a climate change context. Yet, as we have seen, such gestures are not enough. They are so general as to be sub-political, or to be more accurate, like Derridean open-ness to the other in general, they are pre-political. Derrida’s open-ness discloses the unconditionality from which the political emerges, in the way that justice is disclosed in droit. But we need more than a generalised generosity. Justice is nothing without droit. It makes droit possible and always tests it, drawing it on to the self-violating re-making that will improve it, in the endless quest that is reform and optimism. Yet, however justice may enlarge droit, and even appear to reign over it, justice is still nothing without droit, without the specific acts which are the only way in which justice can attain any ontology. Justice is literally nothing without the specific and historicised events of fallible, deconstructible, ever-surpassable, highly questionable droit. A generalised generosity is the same. It is all very well to appeal to it, but there are two dangers here. We have already seen one of these. As the principle of self-violation, generosity, like justice, risks a limitless violence. But the second danger is the inverse: a generosity that does not instantiate itself in specific decisions and historical events, irreducibly questionable and surpassable though these may be, is nothing. Generosity requires decision and action.

Yet, there is a further risk with such punctual acts, and this is the one we face now. I have argued that, because of the asymmetrical and disproportionate nature of the events to unfold in a world remade by climate change, the historical time in which such events are situated is not a time of progressively unfolding
sequences of cause and effect, or of evolution and graduation. It is a disjunctive
time of interruptions and shocks, yet these shocks bring back through the future
the unresolved figures and wrecked structures of the past. Ours is a haunted
future then, but in Derrida’s sense, not of lingering endurances but sudden,
inevitable yet still unexpected returns. As we have seen, this time is irresistibly
open to an otherness that requires a just response: a disjunctive time of events
specifying responsibility in terms of acknowledgement of inherited inequalities
and unfairly distributed vulnerabilities. In other words, it has to be a disjunctive
historicism that remains aware of the past which in an unpredictable future we
will continue to face.

The challenge, therefore, is to be able to remain aware of unjust legacies while
adapting to a different understanding of history. A politics without linear history
has already engulfed political institutions, in which ideology, the primary link
to a linear model of historical time, has become almost completely disconnected
from political identity. The impulse of generosity must tend towards the act,
but it must remain aware. Otherwise, it becomes a self-referential gesture,
one that does not make judgements based on an awareness of injustices, but
descends into the merely charitable act. Climate change will inevitably lead to
large scale movements of population, sometimes as a result of emergency, at
others in the form of slow, constant and steady flows of peoples identified as
economic refugees. Single acts of generosity in response to these populations
risk becoming mere acts of saving, not of justice. In cultures where the logic of
charity is linked to a vocation of redemption, saving is owned by the self more
than it is a redress of the conditions which have made the other move. In calls
for western countries to take climate refugees, and to give funds to ‘developing’
nations to aid them with climate adaptation, what we see is the substitution of
the noble for the political act. These acts must take place, but not according to
that logic of meaning, which simply leaves everything else in place, tinkering
at the problem, and thus compounding it. Situating acts in a hauntological
time both connects them with the type of history unfolding before us in its
interruptions and discontinuities, but also recognises that nothing happens that
is not a result as well as a beginning, and that these complex events can only
be negotiated by addressing climate-political-change as about justice in another
history and not about saving in a sudden emergency.

Nick Mansfield is Dean, Higher Degree Research at Macquarie University. Recent
books include The God Who Deconstructs Himself: Subjectivity and Sovereignty
Between Freud, Bataille and Derrida and Theorizing War: From Hobbes to
Badiou. He is one of the general editors of the journal Derrida Today, published by
Edinburgh University Press.
Works Cited


Droughts and Flooding Rains

Dorothea Mackellar’s infamous flooding rains were absent from the Victorian environment for over a decade, long enough to facilitate the gradual but grudging acceptance amongst the state’s inhabitants of their seemingly interminable counterpart: drought. By 2010, we had not personally experienced ‘proper’ rain since childhood. In absence, even our memories of rain had dimmed; the very idea had been rendered mythological, as abstract as God. We had come to consider Mackellar’s description of ‘steady, soaking rain’ arriving after inevitably temporary periods of drought as nothing more than a literary liberty; an imagined artifice deployed towards the retention of rhyme throughout her patriotic poem rather than a description of actual, observable ecological reality.

Like many Melburnians at this time, we had—at least to a certain extent—reconciled (or resigned) ourselves to a continuing lack of water resources and to the prospect of a very dry future. Then, in late 2010, it began to pour; this was not just rain, but the steady, soaking downpours of what had come to appear as nothing more than a fanciful figment of Mackellar’s imagination. The exhilaration and optimism we experienced in the wake of these rains is difficult to describe. As young people engaged with climate change discourses, existing in painful awareness of the ecological challenges we all confront, and facing the prospect of a life without sufficient water, our experience of sustained, serious rains was transcendent. For a brief window, we felt hope.

By February 2011, however, large tracts of Victoria and Queensland were under water. The scale of the destruction, so tragically precipitated by the very element we had for so long coveted and even prayed for under the haplessly sincere urgings of then Prime Minister Howard (‘Pray for Rain, Urges Howard’), was immense. The sense that something ‘wasn’t right’ in our environment began to re-emerge in public discourses with renewed urgency; the realisation that climate change would result in more frequent and extreme instances of both sides of Mackellar’s environmental coin was disturbingly revelatory. Despite our culture of forgetfulness, facilitated by the longest period of drought on
record (Melbourne Water) on the driest inhabited continent on earth (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade), it turned out Australia was still, after all, a place ‘of droughts and flooding rains’ (Mackellar).

As the floodwaters began to recede, we found ourselves wondering why Mackellar’s observations—representing, as we saw it, the insufficiency of settler Australians’ knowledge of ‘their’ environment—remained inadequately understood, over a century later, by the broader Australian community. Why had the droughts and floods we had just endured come as such an ‘unexpected’ shock and been described, despite their increasingly frequent and repetitive occurrence, as one-in-one-hundred-year events? We found ourselves wondering whether our contemporary experiences of ecological disaster were merely indicative of natural shifts and cycles, or whether something in our environment was already wrong, changed or in the process of changing? In addressing the second question, we came up against the first: why, we wondered, don’t settler Australian cultures know enough about their surrounding environments in order to answer either? Was the answer to be found in Mackellar’s location at ‘home’ in England at the time of writing her patriotic reflection on what she had originally entitled Core of My Heart? That is, does the persistent rite of passage for settler Australians of a journey back to ‘the mother country’ function as a diversion, a displacement, an escape from the settler experience of unsettlement, or a means of reflecting upon and understanding Australia more accurately from afar?

As we were to discover, the questions we found ourselves asking in the wake of the floods were in many ways not particularly or peculiarly timely or topical at all, but referred to enduring facets of settler Australian relationships to Australian lands—to place, settlement and home—that have simply been rendered increasingly urgent under the imminent threat of climate change. The following comprises an examination and attempted explication of some of the issues and questions this period raises in relation to settler unsettlement, travel and climate change in Australia; in particular, the ways in which the travel habits of settler Australians are intertwined with climate change and its mitigation on the one hand and with Australia’s settler-colonial history on the other. It is our suggestion that settler Australians need to settle both physically, by curbing their propensity for air travel and thereby their contribution to anthropogenic climate change, as well as metaphorically, by reconciling with their histories and resolving their as yet unsettled situatedness within settler-colonial Australia.
Settler Australians

By settler Australians, we refer to those who experience a sense of what Hage has termed ‘governmental belonging’ in their relation to the Australian national imaginary; those who see themselves as inhabiting ‘what is often referred to as the national will’ (45-46). Settlers have been defined by Veracini as ‘founders of political orders [who] carry their sovereignty with them’ and can be distinguished from migrant populations on the basis that the latter move to ‘a political order that is already constituted … and are characterised by a defining lack of sovereign entitlement’; whereas ‘[m]igrants… move to another country and lead diasporic lives, settlers… move … to their country’ (Settler Colonialism 3). Yet the boundaries delimiting migrants from the settler population are by no means permanently fixed; the political economy of settler colonialism is ‘a dynamic environment where different groups are routinely imagined as transiting from one section of the population system to another’ (20). Our conception of a restrictedly dynamic settler Australian population may therefore be conceived as closely resembling Hage’s categorisation of ‘White Australians’, into which migrants may be ‘assimilated’ through the accumulation of sufficient ‘practical nationality’, a process nevertheless constrained by an individual’s habitus and the limitations imposed upon it by the ‘aristocracy of the field’ (53-62).

In Australia, the dominant ethnic core of the (settler) nation (Smith) has been historically inhabited by settlers of Anglo-Celtic origins and descent and it is this aristocratic section of the Australian population to which our analysis primarily pertains. Yet beyond this analytically useful categorisation we also acknowledge the complexity and contingency of the settler collective; in adopting the term ‘settler Australians’, we are not intending to artificially homogenise or render monolithic an inherently dynamic and heterogeneous situation. Rather we are intentionally adopting the taxonomy of settler-colonialism in order to uncover, analyse and thereby problematise the specific structural imperatives and exigencies we conceive as central to the settler Australian experience, perhaps more central to the experiences of settlers of Anglo-Celtic origins than others but of relevance to all those who regard themselves as inhabitants of the settler Australian national imaginary nonetheless. Importantly, as Read has outlined, settler Australians can and do experience a sense of belonging in place (Returning to Nothing; Belonging); our intention here is not to undermine or dismiss these legitimate individual experiences, but to outline what we conceive as the structural barriers against the emergence of a deeper, collective sense of settledness amongst the settler Australian population deriving from Australia’s settler-colonial foundations.
Seeing Double: Unsettled Settlers in Settler Australia

It is now a commonplace to observe that the doctrine of *terra nullius* rested not only on the wholesale denial of indigenous knowledges and histories, but derived its most powerful legitimating force through association with Lockean conceptions of property, whereby ‘[w]hatsoever … he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his Labour with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property’ (Locke 116). In this construction, the fact that ‘indigenous peoples did not engage in European style agriculture’ meant that ‘they did not really own the land, but merely ranged over it’ (Lloyd 34).

However, here we wish to emphasise that the ‘settlement’ of Australia under the Enlightenment ideologies of progress and improvement (Gascoigne) involves a ‘*double*’ effacement of memory: an effacement of the migratory history of the settler and the effacement of the Aborigines as autochthons’ (Garbutt, *The Locals*, our emphasis). The moment of ‘settlement’ is constructed by settler society as Year Zero (Rose, *Reports From a Wild Country*), as the beginning of knowledge (Arthur 54-57) and the beginning of history (45). This is made true for both the coloniser and the colonised; ‘[t]he experience of colonisation is about beginning again; time does not migrate but remains in the originating country’ (45). Australia becomes ‘the *tabula rasa* upon which [the colonising culture] will inscribe its civilisation’ (Rose, *Reports From a Wild Country* 62).

Any intimations of a pre-existing sovereign indigenous presence are, quite literally, washed away with the ‘tide of history’; Australia as *terra incognita* here becomes a *terra nullius*—literally a ‘land belonging to no-one’ (Reynolds, *The Law of the Land* 12). Having disavowed indigenous knowledges, history and sovereignty in preparing the ground for ‘settlement’ and having inadvertently dislocated and thereby negated their own historicity in the process, the settlers find themselves alone within an empty geographical and historical space; a *terra nullius incognita*. In this situation, the settler is left with little option but to imagine themselves accepting the ‘mantle of belonging to the land’ from the indigene as the inevitable outcome of progressive linear history (Rose, *Reports From a Wild Country* 117) and as the only possibility of escape from an unsettled state of ‘*historylessness’* (Veracini, ‘*Historylessness’*).

The notion of replacement—of striving ‘for the elimination of the native in favour of an unmediated connection between the settlers and the land’ (Veracini *Settler Colonialism* 272)—constitutes a fundamental, foundational feature of the settler colonial order. In Wolfe’s definition, ‘[s]ettler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of native societies’ (*Settler Colonialism* 2); unlike
other forms of colonialism, settler colonisation has as its ‘primary object ... the land itself’ and is therefore ‘a winner-take-all project whose dominant feature is not exploitation but replacement’ (163). To the extent that the settler colonial imagination constructs a geographically and historically negated space emerging at the moment of its own inception, this process of elimination and replacement appears relatively straightforward.

Yet the settler promises to be a superior indigene precisely because ‘he’ brings his history—and with it, ‘his’ superior knowledge and practices—with him; he can no more efface his own pre-history without undermining his legitimating claims for ‘settlement’ than he can completely replace the indigene without doing so. Further, the settler is compelled to keep the category of indigene intact in order to (attempt to) inhabit it, yet in the act of emptying it of historical significance to enable its inhabitation he renders it obsolete. The ‘founding forgetting’ (Garbutt, The Locals 191) required by and for both terra incognita and terra nullius consequently remains always and everywhere incomplete; the very act of founding through attempted elimination and replacement prohibits the possibility of forgetting.

The ‘long transitive moment’ ushered in by European colonisation may therefore be conceived as presenting ‘problems for settlers as well as for Aboriginal people’ due to the inevitably unfulfilled ‘redemptive purpose’ of replacing the indigenous order with a new and improved settler-colonial civilisation (Rose, Reports From a Wild Country 66). Settler indigenisation remains, in Goldie’s terms, ‘an impossible necessity’ (13); an ‘important site of conflict’ is consequently created for settler societies at the contested point of juncture between ‘the backward-looking impotence of exile and the forward-looking impetus to indigeneity’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 135).

Further, the continuing existence of an aboriginal presence—literally, a presence from the origin (Hodge and Mishra 25)—functions constantly and unsettlingly to remind the settler of their status as ‘an alien in their own land’, initiating a persistent ‘separation of belonging’ at the core of the settler experience (Garbutt, The Locals 192). It therefore remains the case that in relation to the establishment of the settler order, ‘to get in the way all the native has to do is stay at home’ (Rose, cited in Wolfe, Settler Colonialism 1). In ‘staying at home’—which is to say surviving—Indigenous Australians continually confront settler Australians with not only the reality of settlers’ pre-history elsewhere—at ‘home’ in England, the Default Country (Arthur)—but also with the facticity of the foundational act of violent dispossession. Indigenous Australians consequently constitute a ‘maximal threat to [the] legitimacy’ of settler Australians by undermining their already insecure sovereign foundations (Hodge and Mishra 25); a sense of illegitimacy exacerbated by settler Australia’s continued reliance on the ‘legal
fiction’ of *terra nullius* (Langton, ‘Science Fictions’) — which the High Court’s decision in *Mabo No. 2* overturned ‘in relation to property but reaffirmed … in the matter of sovereignty’ (Reynolds, ‘New Frontiers’ 139).

Similarly, the double vision inherent within the settler Australian lexicon leads to a continuing colonial consciousness ‘of two places at the same moment’, a simultaneous awareness of ‘the colonised landscape and the landscape of origin’ (Arthur 27). To the extent that this awareness remains a facet of settler existence for ‘as long as the colonist remembers that this was a place where the colonist society or individual once was not’ (27) — a memory embedded within the language itself — settlers are repeatedly reminded of both their exile and arrival and yet prevented from either escaping the former or ultimately establishing the latter. Settler Australians find themselves haunted by a specifically settler-colonial ‘spectre of comparisons’.

It is our suggestion that, as a result of these complex and conflicting settler-colonial exigencies and imperatives, settler Australians find themselves existing in an intractable double bind, a permanent state of unsettlement in which they experience ‘a filiative and an affiliative connection with “home” … where “home” is alternatively (or simultaneously) both the “old” and the “new” place’ (21) and yet fail to feel at home in either. In facing forwards towards their impossible but necessary indigenisation whilst simultaneously glancing anxiously backwards over their shoulder in an attempt to both draw upon and disavow their pre-historic connection to the Default Country, the settler negates their own knowledge and historicity — along with that of their indigenous Other — and thereby renders themselves unsettled everywhere and settled nowhere, confined within the triangular dialectic between colonial and indigene (Veracini *Settler Colonialism*). Trapped between the competing imperatives of settler-colonialism, the first ‘striving for indigenisation and national autonomy, the other aiming at neo-European replication and the establishment of a “civilised” pattern of life’ (21), the imagined, ideal, indigenous-settler society remains ‘a society “to come”’ (23).

**Settler Australia as a Site of Travel and Exile**

Settler Australia is *founded* on travel. In the aftermath of the initial arrival of Europeans, ‘[t]housands of people voyaged over 10,000 miles, half the globe, from Northern Europe to the Antipodes’ (Sussex xi) and continue to do so today. While the composition and motivations of settler Australia’s migratory history are complex, diverse and have varied over time, the nearly 98% of Australia’s current population of non-Indigenous descent ‘are either immigrants (23%), the children of immigrants (22%) or the descendants of fairly recent immigrants
Australian language of settlement has no language for migration except for those who come after, who are next, who forever embody migration as ‘migrants’, who come here from ‘somewhere else’ … It has no language for a story that keeps the migration of Anglo-Celtic settlers in mind as migrants. (Garbutt, ‘Towards an Ethic of Location’ 179)

Thus the structural distinction between settlers and migrants on the basis of the former category’s sovereign capacity is reinforced through the simultaneous homogenisation of the history of Australian immigration by those we have termed settlers, alongside the historical and linguistic self-effacement of settlers’ own migratory history through claims to white autochthony (Garbutt, *The Locals*). It remains the case that the ‘majority of Australians at most points in our history have been migrants or the children and grandchildren of migrants’ (Pesman 19), yet through the necessary but necessarily implausible transformation of settler claims that ‘we were here first’ into claims that ‘we were always here’ (Garbutt, *The Locals* 203), migrants are permanently displaced as ‘new Australians’, while settler Australians once again replace Indigenous Australians in their originary status.

However, even if the settler’s ‘backward glance [is] one of rejection’ (Pesman 19)—as evident in characterisations of Australia as an egalitarian and classless society in opposition to ‘Old England’, for example—(Veracini, ‘Historylessness’ 271)—‘part of our attention has always been fixed somewhere else’ (Pesman 19); the persistently unsettling awareness of a pre-existent ‘home’ elsewhere renders settler Australia a ‘haunted’ place (Porter), even for ostensibly settled settlers. While within the ‘clearing’ of *terra nullius incognita* Anglo-Celtic migrants show up as colonists, then settlers, and eventually as locals’ so that their dynamic and transitive history of migration ‘becomes sedentary, not migratory’, the settler psyche nevertheless finds itself ‘haunted by the place left behind’ (Garbutt, *The Locals* 207). Despite the obvious linguistic implications of the language of settlement—which attempts to make permanent the inherently transitory—settled settler Australia might therefore be more appropriately understood as an uncanny site of exile and travel in and of itself.

Offord and Haebich define exile in terms of ‘the experience of uncertainty and insecurity, and a consequential expression of logic that is based on a search for a sense of belonging and a sense of place’ (1); such a definition encapsulates precisely the settler situation of unsettled settledness we have attempted to articulate above. As Levitus suggests, settler Australians
do not have the benefit of many centuries of living in one place; but a relationship [to the land] nevertheless [exists] based on the diverse experiences of travel and exile. It [is] a transitory relationship to place and the landscape ... coupled with a yearning to belong. (Cited in Read, Belonging 4)

Despite compulsive attempts to the contrary, settler Australians have consequently experienced their historical and geographical circumstances in terms of movement, constructing their identities through an inherently transitory disposition within which the tensions Levitus identifies—that is, between a yearning to belong and an equally compelling yearning to escape—remain intractable.

In Musgrove’s description, the ‘travelling subject, wavering between two worlds, is by no means the self-assured colonist; rather, that subject is poised to split and unravel … in a fundamentally reflexive confrontation with the unsustainable values of “home”’ (39). Here, Musgrove might as well be addressing the settler as the traveller; both waver—or find themselves caught—within the liminal in-between zone separating two (or more) worlds, constantly haunted by the spectre of ‘home’ while comfortably at home nowhere. As Musgrove continues, the ‘traveller’s action of wavering between worlds is potentially annihilating … [it is] underscored by the anxious sense that to travel is to “be nowhere”’ (32). Settler Australians continuously and compulsively shift between worlds; between various potential homelands (here, elsewhere, nowhere) as well as between self-constructed narratives of history and identity and the reality of settler-colonial circumstances; between White Australia on the one hand and the Reality (Hage) of Indigenous sovereignty on the other. To some extent, then, to inhabit the uncertain identity of the settler Australian is to find oneself ‘nowhere’; if travellers experience acute—and potentially annihilating—unsettlement and uncertainty in the way that we suggest settler Australians do at ‘home’, then the continent itself can indeed be conceived as a site of travel.

For settler Australians, travel consequently involves an additional(ly) unsettling duality; when settler Australians travel, they move away from their already ambivalent physical and metaphysical location in Australia into equally ambivalent locations elsewhere, arguably only amplifying their already unsettled state; travel therefore functions to compound rather than relieve the settler experience of what Gelder and Jacobs have termed the ‘uncanny’ (23). In their analysis, ‘an “uncanny” experience may occur when one’s home is rendered ... unfamiliar; one has the experience ... of being in place and “out of place” simultaneously’ (23). This feeling epitomises the settler’s experience of unsettlement in contemporary Australia as we have described it, yet the uncanny works both ways; within the context of settler-colonial Australia as a site of travel itself, but also and simultaneously in the context of returning
‘home’. As Christou has argued—although in another cultural context—upon return the ‘possibilities of being “in exile” while “at home” ... convey feelings of estrangement from the homeland that returnees longed to return to’ (125). There can, in other words, be no going back; settlers have become—as they always intended themselves to be—settled in their unsettled situatedness as settler Australians. Through the complex linguistic and historical processes outlined above by means of which their pre-historic connections with another ‘home’ elsewhere have been dissembled and disavowed, the settler has left themselves stranded in a literal and symbolic ‘no man’s land’ without any home at all.

Returnees’ simultaneous exile and ‘at-home-ness’ within both contemporary and historical ‘homelands’ can consequently be conceived as an uncanny experience; to be a settler Australian at this time is to find oneself confined within a global uncanny sphere; both at home and not at home on the continent; both at home and not at home elsewhere. Travel cannot, therefore, offer an antidote to unsettledness, for it embodies the uncanny in itself. Yet while settler Australia exists as a site of travel and exile, travel also appears to the unsettled settler as a potential means of escape. In Pesman’s understanding, ‘[h]ome for migrants is two places, that of domicile and present loyalty and that of family origins, traditions and history’ (19); in ours, home for settlers is no place at all. And yet in defiance of our analysis, the migrants’ ‘desire to make a return journey … to visit relatives and to reconnect to origins … [which] has fuelled much of Australian travel, first to Europe and now to anywhere in the world’ (19) persists amongst settler Australians—at least amongst those of Anglo-Celtic origins or descent—even today, in the form of the ritualistic pilgrimage ‘home’ to England.

Travel and ‘Home’

Travel and movement have comprised central components of the historical and contemporary experiences of all three agencies existing within the triangular dialectics of Australian settler colonialism, settlers, migrants and Indigenous Australians, throughout each of their separate and entangled histories; settler Australians have arguably existed in what we have attempted to articulate as an interminable site of travel since the time of first arrival, while migrants have only more recently begun to travel home under the sanction of a newly permissive settler society emerging from the 1970s onwards (Haebich); Indigenous Australians possess their own history and modality of movement (Pesman, White and Walker ix). For settlers in particular, however, the notion of returning ‘home’ to England has persisted as a coveted and exonerated form of social capital in a relatively consistent and continuous manner since the time
of first ‘settlement’; as Alomes suggests, ever ‘since convicts [were] transported ... the return to Britain [has] been culturally important ... a natural inversion of the original banishment of convict exile or ... colonial separation’ (2).

Writing in 1913, Alice Rosmon noted that ‘the average Australian girl cherishes an ambition to come to London’ (cited in Woollacott 1003), an ambition that has continued into the present. Despite the ‘change in the direction of the colonial gaze’ away from ‘Home’ in England and back towards the place in which settlers find themselves residing from the late 1960s onwards (Arthur 30), as recently as 2003 Inkson and Myers found that because Australia is ‘geographically isolated from the “mother country” ... Every year, tens of thousands of young Australians ... make their pilgrimage to London ... [as] a rite of passage, a symbol of adulthood, a social norm, a source of pride’ (171). It is our contention that this compulsion as it has manifested amongst settler Australians in the late or ‘liquid’ modern period (Bauman, *Liquid Times*) has been driven by the complex interplay of three specifically contemporary influences: firstly, the increasing availability and acceptance of aviation as a mode of travel; secondly, the deterritorialisation and destabilisation of formerly—at least relatively—stable identities; and finally, the emergence of an active and agentive Indigenous presence within Australian historiography and consequently settler consciousness.

To a certain extent the continuation of the phenomenon of returning ‘home’ beyond the period in which England has been legitimately, or acceptably, referred to as such amongst Australians of Anglo-Celtic origins or descent may well be attributed to the broader global ‘democratisation of travel’ which has occurred over at least the last 20 years (Pesman 26), in which ‘there has ... been a transition from aviation being a luxury form of mobility for the wealthy few to being a self-evident and often cheap means of mass transportation for large parts of society in industrialized countries’ (Gössling, Ceron and Dubois 132). While the degree to which the dramatic increases in global air travel represent a process of increasing democratisation rather than stratification under what Bauman has termed ‘glocalisation’—within which ‘[s]ome inhabit the globe [while] others are chained to place’ (‘On Glocalization’ 45)—must be questioned (Davidson; Gössling, Ceron and Dubois; Urry), it remains the case, at least for many members of the settler Australian Anglo aristocracy, that the increasing availability and affordability of air travel has functioned as an important enabler of ancestral (re)visitation.

Further, the ever-increasing influences of globalising processes within what Bauman has termed ‘liquid modernity’ (*Liquid Times*) have arguably engendered what Guibernau has described as a form of ‘ontological insecurity’ (134). While the potential responses to this global state of unsettlement are multiple, Richards and Wilson identify ‘growing numbers of people ... reacting to the alienation of modern society by adopting the lifestyle of the backpacker’ (3). While
the typically *monadic* (Davidson 49-50) disposition of the modern nomadism Richards and Wilson describe is qualitatively different than that of the ancestral journeying we are concerned with, for many—and not only settlers—the opportunity to travel and consequently the opportunity and impetus to travel *home* has indeed arisen at the point of juncture between the dual influences of hypermobility (Adams) and destabilisation characteristic of globalised late modernity. This mode of travel may well, as Haebich suggests, constitute ‘a nostalgic reaction against the globalising world as people search for “fixity” in a placeless world where everywhere and nowhere and even movement itself can be space/place, safe/perilous and home/exile’ (202).

However, for settlers in particular, a third factor has arisen as an impetus towards traveling ‘home’; that is, the progressive dismantling of the ‘great Australian silence’—the ‘cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale’ correctly identified by Stanner as a ‘structural’ feature of settler Australian historiography (189)—from the late 1960s onwards (Veracini, ‘Prehistory of Australia’s History Wars’). In the process of uncovering an active and agentive Indigenous presence within Australian historiography and therefore settler consciousness—or, rather, progressively reversing the impossible necessity of its historical repression (Veracini, ‘Historylessness’ 279)—critical and polyphonic histories have further challenged and destabilised settler claims to settled- and therefore *settler*-ness (Garbutt, *The Locals* 202). The (re)emergence of a sovereign indigenous presence within settler history undermines the ‘founding forgetting’ so integral to the settler’s self-construction as a settler; the double effacement of history is consequently rendered ineffectual and the settler’s own history of migration simultaneously (re)emerges; double vision returns and the Default Country consequently (re)appears. The settler imperative to travel “home” thus materialises as a potential and attractive means of further ‘denial and avoidance’ (Haebich 200), especially in light of the specific challenges to settler sovereignty instantiated by the High Court’s *Mabo No. 2* and *Wik* decisions.

Pyne recounts George Bernard Shaw’s memorable description of Australians travelling ‘home’ to England as follows

‘you Australasians are extraordinary … Every year, thousands of you … journey to see an inferior country which you persist in calling Home in spite of the fact that its people ignore you and are scarcely aware of your existence.’ Make Australia your home, he admonished. Stay. Settle. (315)

While it may be both understandable and reasonable for settler Australians to maintain close contemporary connections to England and other homelands, these connections can be read as reflecting an inherently outward-looking disposition; as Diamond notes, ‘most Australians don’t depend on or really live in the Australian environment: they live instead in one of those five big cities …
connected to the outside world, rather than to the Australian landscape’ (388). This disposition is motivated by an underlying sense of settler unsettlement and the resultant imperatives and exigencies towards modes and methods of escape, the persistence of such connections functions to prohibit attainment of the specific objective urged by Shaw; that is, to settle, to develop a substantive sense of settledness amongst the settler population in and with the place it finds itself historically and geographically located. Consequently, while the settler’s necessarily pre-existent historical connection to another place is seized upon as a potential source of alleviation for their persistently unsettled state, in reality such a move functions to obfuscate any requirement for them to address the underlying causes of their predicament.

Of more immediate and pressing concern, however, are the significant environmental implications arising from the ongoing maintenance of these connections through incessant and unquestioning air travel, since air travel seriously compounds ecological issues; it is a highly polluting mode of transport (Daley; Gössling and Upham). Given that the growth of the aviation industry is proceeding apace in a world that requires drastic and immediate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions if it is to survive in any recognisable or anthropologically inhabitable state, the imperatives for settler Australians to settle are becoming increasingly and urgently important.

**Flying into Climate Change**

In a world where greenhouse gas emissions must be lowered—and even, it now appears, reversed (Rigby)—if life on earth as we know it is to survive into the future, any industry whose emissions are slated to grow, as are those of the aviation industry, should be regarded as highly problematic, even dangerous. As Gössling et al. suggest, while ‘[t]he contribution of aviation to climate change is, with a global share of just 2 per cent of emissions of CO2 … often regarded as negligible’, this (mis)perception ‘ignores … the current and expected growth in air traffic, as well as its sociocultural drivers. Aviation is a rapidly growing sector, with annual passenger growth forecasts of 4.9 per cent in the coming 20 years’ (131). Further to the corresponding increases in the overall emissions of this already emissions-intensive industry, it should be emphasised that aviation is singled out by those concerned by climate change, over and above other admittedly ecologically damaging forms of transport such as driving, because it is the altitude at which emissions are released, not simply the emissions themselves, that causes so much destruction (see Daley; Gössling). As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Chance (IPCC) has determined, the overall warming effect of aircraft emissions are around 2.7 times greater than ‘the release of fossil carbon alone’ due to the altitude at which they are
released (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). Gössling and Upham conclude that ‘aviation is without a doubt significant in terms of climate change … because of the comparably expensive options for emissions reductions in this sector, the rapid growth of air travellers, as well as its sociocultural and economic importance’ (13).

This situates flying as a particularly problematic form of transport from an environmental point of view compared to other modes or methods of transportation and explains why overland travel, in most cases, is less environmentally damaging than the equivalent flight. However, seeking to replace flight with alternative, land-based methods is also problematic; as Monbiot points out,

[...] new fuel consumption figures for both fast passenger ships and ultra high-speed trains suggest that their carbon emissions are comparable to those of planes ... What all this means is that if we want to stop the planet from cooking, we will simply have to stop travelling at the kind of speeds that planes permit. (‘We Are All Killers’)

Despite this uncomfortable yet unavoidable reality, amongst those in wealthy, industrialised societies, flying—as well as the underlying cultural imperative of entitled hypermobility—is rarely positioned as a choice. Nor is it discussed in terms of its social justice implications and contribution to the perpetuation of existing inequalities, even though these two characteristics are of fundamental importance to any consideration of aviation.

With regard to the former, we are now living in an era defined by travel and, more specifically, travel by aviation (Gössling and Upham). Flying is an assumed and unquestioned mode of transport for many journeys, particularly in Australia, where Blainey’s ‘tyranny of distance’ engenders an especially positive attitude towards both domestic and international travel (Westerhausen 14). The rate of growth in travel in general and aviation in particular is simultaneously manifesting and enabling a global understanding of corporeal movement as a positive and desirable part of life; the more we travel, the more fundamentally travel becomes an intrinsic element of existence, viewed as a basic human right akin to attaining food, shelter and work. This is, of course, privileged reasoning; the very concept of leisure travel, or of air travel as an entitlement rather than a luxury, is largely a Western construct; ‘[i]mplicit in [our] culture is the idea that one is both entitled to travel and should travel. It ought to be an essential part of one’s life and is a fundamental human right’ (Urry 257). However, it is also important to note that the developing middle-classes in China and India will see more and more people worldwide slated to partake in regular flying for pleasure and work (Gössling and Upham 9), with correspondingly detrimental environmental consequences to follow.
Yet despite a growing awareness of climate change, travel by aviation remains a taken-for-granted aspect of contemporary existence; even when it is conceived as a matter of choice, the possibility of choosing not to fly is inevitably construed as either implausible or irrelevant. While the creator of the travel writing empire *Rough Guides*, for example, is concerned about the aviation industry’s impact on the environment, he simultaneously feels comfortable stating that ‘I very much respect the purist attitudes of those who say they will never fly again, but it’s totally unrealistic to expect the majority to do the same’ (Hill); for him, the very possibility of choosing not to fly is dismissed in the same moment as it appears.

In a similarly obfuscating move, Hickman is able to admit that in England ‘[i]t seems … we, as a nation that avidly consumes cheap flights, do indeed face a choice’, yet proceeds to position this choice as arising between the competing options of continuing to ‘partake in … what the industry describes as “non-essential” travel’ or starting to ‘ration this habit, even if others elsewhere in the world quite understandably will be quick to take our place on the plane’ (our emphasis). Here, travel, especially of the ‘non-essential’ kind, is constructed as an actual and even conceivable choice. Yet in Hickman’s self-justifying position, it is the willingness of others to take one’s place and thereby negate any positive impact such an admittedly difficult choice might possess, which renders the choice itself irrelevant. This echoes arguments employed to such great effect in the Australian context against the idea of taking legislative action to curb our emissions: if other countries, especially China and India, aren’t willing to follow suit—despite increasing evidence that that is precisely what they are already doing (Garnaut, *The Garnaut Review 2011*)—then why should we ‘act first’ and condemn ourselves to ‘competitive disadvantage’?

Monbiot notes lamentingly that the problems of flying are now broadly understood by almost everyone I meet. But it has had no impact whatever on their behaviour. When I challenge my friends about their planned weekend in Rome or their holiday in Florida, they respond with a strange, distant smile and avert their eyes … The moral dissonance is deafening. (‘We Are All Killers’)

However, ‘our’ (wealthy, Western) cultural positioning of flying as a basic human entitlement remains highly problematic not only in its contribution to increases in global emissions in general, but also to the increasingly recognised relationship between climate change and social justice more specifically (Davidson; Monbiot ‘We Are All Killers’; Moss; Plumwood *Environmental Culture*; Urry). As a result of their disproportionate and disproportionately distributed contribution to the manifestation of anthropogenic climate change, aviation and other emissions-intensive modes of transport impinge upon the actual human rights of those who will be most affected by climatic shifts and
natural disasters, mainly those in the so-called ‘third’ and ‘fourth’ worlds; that is, citizens of disadvantaged, ‘less-developed’ nations and disadvantaged, often indigenous, peoples in ‘developed’ nations (‘The Language of Foreign Affairs’).

Climate change is occurring as a result of the affluent lifestyles of a small proportion of the world’s population; in relation to the impacts of aviation in particular, ‘it can be estimated that only about 2-3 per cent of the world’s population fly in between any two countries over one consecutive year, indicating that participation in air travel is highly unequally distributed on a global scale’ (Gössling, Ceron and Dubois 131). Even within industrialised societies, it is only ‘a minority of highly mobile individuals who account for a large share of the overall kilometres travelled’ (131). Yet the actions of this select few will negatively impact upon the many; as Monbiot articulates it, ‘[s]ome 92 million Bangladeshis could be driven out of their homes this century, in order that we can still go shopping in New York. Flying kills. We all know it, and we all do it’ (‘We Are All Killers’).

The Ecological Implications of Unsettled Settlers

As Lines has argued,

[i]n 200 years European technology, warfare, culture and political economy have swept across the Australian landscape as an expression of manifest destiny, changing forever the face of the land. Nowhere else on earth have so few people pauperised such a large proportion of the world’s surface in such a brief period of time. (12-13)

It is difficult to imagine a more severe disjunction between epistemological construction and ontological experience than one which has allowed such a disturbing reality to eventuate. However, the relationships between European Enlightenment epistemology and colonisation, as well as the implications of both the precepts and products of this system of thought for Australian peoples and ecologies, have been more than adequately explicated by others elsewhere (see, for example, Carter; Gascoigne; Griffiths; Langton, ‘The European Construction of Wilderness’; Langton, ‘Science Fictions’; Lines; Moran; Plumwood, Environmental Culture; Reynolds, The Law of the Land; Rigby; Rose, Reports From a Wild Country; Suchet; Wolfe, ‘On Being Woken Up’). We are concerned specifically with the ecological implications arising from the persistently unsettled nature of the settler situation in Australia as a site of travel and exile; it is our central contention that the cultural and ecological consequences of allowing this situation to continue into an already environmentally altered future will be
devastating, not only for settlers themselves but also for their national migrant and indigenous cohabitants. And here there emerges yet another implication of ‘exile’, for as Hamilton notes of our future in a climatically altered world, for ‘many, only by moving will they survive’ (204).

In settler colonial Australia, the ecological issues we will and have already arguably begun to confront as a result of the anthropogenic climate change to which our flying habits—amongst other, multiple, manifestations of our situation as unsettled settlers—have contributed, are concerning, even dire. Importantly, as the original Garnaut Climate Change Review suggested, Australia has a larger interest in effective global mitigation [of climate change] than any other developed country, because it is already a country of climate extremes, because of its geographic location in relation to shifts in global climate, and because it is located in a region of vulnerable developing countries. (Garnaut, ‘Update Paper 2’ 5)

Yet while there has been at least some segment of the settler Australian population for whom the decimation and degradation of the Australian environment has been of concern for as long as its exploitation has been systematically and exponentially occurring—that is, ever since first ‘settlement’ (Bonyhady)—Australia remains one of the world’s highest per capita emitters and continues to be ‘a drag on the global mitigation effort in contradiction to its own strong national interest in effective global mitigation’ (Garnaut, ‘Update Paper 2’ 25). It is our suggestion that this paradoxical and fundamentally irrational situation—in the sense of acting precisely against one’s own interests—constitutes a consequence of the state of anxious exile and un-settlement which persists as a structural feature of settler Australian culture, manifest in the extent to which Australians remain ‘outward-looking’, historically, culturally and geographically.

Settling Settler Australia

Arthur notes that “[t]o settle” is defined in Australian English as: ‘to settle (a place) with non-Aboriginal inhabitants and secondly to establish oneself, esp. as a farmer, on land not previously occupied by non-Aboriginal inhabitants’ (38), yet the term also extends to incorporate more productive possibilities applicable to the Australian settler colonial context. Here we turn—albeit ironically—back to the ‘mother country’ for authoritative affirmation, adopting the Oxford English Dictionary definition in place of the Australian National Dictionary definition as cited above, where the term includes the potential to ‘resolve or reach an agreement or decision about (an argument or problem) … [to] adopt a more steady or secure style of life … [to] become or make calmer or quieter … [to] begin to feel comfortable in a new situation … [and, importantly, to] pay
(a debt or account)’ (Soanes and Stevenson). While many of these implications have been falsely applied within the Australian lexicon to discursively imagine and enact the very disavowal of indigenous sovereignty and even existence we are seeking to problematise and overturn—by imagining and maintaining the myth of ‘peaceful settlement’ in the outright absence of any form of settlement, legitimate or otherwise—they simultaneously possess the potential to imagine and enact a different future in which settler Australians find themselves able to settle; firstly with Indigenous Australians and, secondly, with Australian lands.

In keeping with our epistemological inheritance, we will attempt to outline our conclusion in doubles. Firstly, in our conception, settler Australians find themselves existing in a permanent state of unsettlement as a result of their illegitimate foundations and the double effacement integral to their own self-construction—the effacement involved in their continuing attempts to displace and replace the pre-existing, sovereign indigenous presence on the one hand and the corresponding effacement of their own migratory histories on the other. Secondly, as a consequence of this persistent state of unsettlement, settlers possess an inherently outward-looking historical, cultural and geographical disposition which perpetuates both settler degradation of the Australian environment and their disproportionate contribution to climate change, apparent in the—predictably—dual imperatives of denying the realities of the lands in which they live and simultaneously seeking escape through travel and hypermobility. The imperatives, exigencies and implications arising as a result of this disposition manifest themselves in further perpetuation of settler unsettlement and anxiety, leading to our conception of Australia as a transitory space of exile and travel in and of itself. Within this unsettled and unsettling space, settlers find themselves compelled to look forwards, towards an admittedly unattainable future in which they have superseded Indigenous Australians in their direct connection with the Australian lands while compulsively looking backwards over their shoulder towards the Default Country in the hope of (re)locating and (re)constructing the historical inheritance they inadvertently disavowed in their initial act of ‘founding forgetting’.

However, it seems self-evident from this reconstruction of the history of Australian ‘settlement’ that settlers must first turn backwards in order to move forwards; under the urgent imperatives of imminent ecological destruction and anthropogenic climate change, settlers must avert their inherently exilic gaze from their pre-histories at ‘home’ in the Default Country to confront the historical, cultural and geographical realities of the lands in which they live. In doing so, there must initially and inevitably occur a fundamental recognition of the realities of settler colonisation and its outcomes for Australian lands and peoples, including for settlers themselves. In particular, a correction in the imagined yet impossible necessity of displacing and replacing Indigenous
Australians in their connection with Australian lands must be superseded by a mode of dialogical openness to the opportunities, both ecological and cultural, afforded by the continuation of this connection. In this sense, climate change may be conceived as offering settler Australians an opportunity to finally settle; for while it remains the case that ‘ecoharms’ are currently—and will continue to be—as unequally and unevenly distributed as other forms of harm in a society characterised by remoteness (Plumwood, *Environmental Culture* 85), in the current climate all Australians find themselves with something to lose. Further, while *Mabo* and *Wik* ultimately failed to deliver the recognition of and reconciliation with Indigenous Australians many had hoped for, all Australians not only have something to lose but something to gain by opening themselves to the histories of the continent on which they live as a necessary precursor to addressing—or at least adapting to—imminent climate change.

However, as Greenblatt rightly argues,

> [t]here is no going back to the fantasy that once upon a time there were settled, coherent, and perfectly integrated … communities … [w]e need to understand colonization, exile, emigration, wandering, contamination, and unintended consequences, along with the fierce compulsions of greed, longing, and restlessness, for it is these disruptive forces that principally shape the history and diffusion of identity. (2)

In advocating the reorientation of the settler gaze back towards the histories and realities of the continent on which the settler exists, we are not proposing a turn away from the future or, indeed, away from the outside world; on the contrary, we posit such a reorientation as a prerequisite for the possibility of imagining and engaging with a positive and attainable future and locatedness instead of the double dissembling and disavowal we conceive as characteristic of contemporary settler existence.

With regard to aviation specifically as both cause and symptom of the present state of settler unsettlement, the possibility of grounding flight is most often countered—outside the forms of outright or underhanded dismissal as outlined above—by the notion that to limit travel is to manifest cultural devolution, to undo the positive ‘progress’ of modernity. The fear here is that becoming grounded will reduce our lives, consigning them to some imagined, static, pre-globalised state. Aside from the myriad difficulties inherent in the alternative—environmental destruction—the fundamental problem of the assertion remains that there is no going back. The increasing availability and accessibility of internet and communications technologies generates the possibility for a potential grounded culture emerging apart from those of the past, yet in addition to the inadequacy of these technologies in replicating current modes of co-presence (Urry), they are not themselves without significant ecological implications.
In Australia, a 2010 report by Connection Research determined that ‘ICT is responsible for nearly 2.7 percent of Australia’s total carbon emissions … [and] is directly responsible for more than 7 per cent of all electricity generated in Australia’ (256), while in the same year the annual carbon footprint of the Internet was estimated as equivalent to ‘every person in the UK flying to America and back twice over’ (Clark and Berners-Lee).

Consequently, while in the potentially emergent world of virtual interconnectivity we could conceivably remain linked—in ever increasing capacities—to the outside world, even as our corporeal selves remained in place, it seems, as Monbiot suggests, that what may be required for the mitigation of anthropogenic climate change—or at least a reduction in its effects—is simply self-imposed restraint. As he has suggested with regard to aviation, this means the end of distant foreign holidays, unless you are prepared to take a long time getting there … that business meetings must take place over the internet or by means of video conferences … that transcontinental journeys must be made by train or coach … that journeys around the world must be reserved for visiting the people you love, and that they will require both slow travel and the saving up of carbon rations … the end of shopping trips to New York, parties in Ibiza, second homes in Tuscany … unless you believe that these activities are worth the sacrifice of the biosphere and the lives of the poor. (‘On the Flightpath to Global Meltdown’)

However, nor does the adoption by settler Australians of an ‘ethics of location’ (Garbutt, ‘Towards an Ethic of Location’; Garbutt, The Locals) aiming towards the recognition of and reconciliation with Indigenous Australians and Australian lands through a dialogical disposition founded on understandings of interconnectivity and inclusivity entail turning away from the outside world. To do so would be to simply (re)perpetuate the epistemic hyperseparations so deeply implicated in the issues we have been discussing (Plumwood, Environmental Culture) in much the same way as contemporary preservationist environmental discourse functions to reverse rather than disrupt the dualisms it ostensibly rejects (Suchet 146). Neither does such a disposition entail an uncritical adoption of a ‘Heideggerian singularity of focus [which] legitimates a narrowing of place relationship to a special place, in a way that supports a concept of the home property of a (national) self that is strongly set apart from and above other places, in terms of care and priority’ (Plumwood, ‘Shadow Places’ 144). Rather, what is required is the emergence of a non-possessive conception of belonging capable of encompassing dialogue, relationality and concepts of sharing—particularly as pertaining to present understandings of sovereignty (Chartrand; Fleras; Tully)—a rethinking of the very notion of belonging so persistently problematic in the settler colonial context (Read, Returning to Nothing; Read, Belonging).
This reconceptualisation would not prohibit travel in and of itself—even travel by aviation—but would rather function to render the structural settler-colonial imperatives towards the compulsively monadic and escapist mode of travel we have identified amongst settler Australians effectively redundant. The reorientation of settler consciousness away from haunting images of ‘Home’ and towards the multiple, complex and divergent histories of the place in which they live, along with the removal of the imperative towards escape through substantive negotiated settlement, would enable the emergence of a mode of journeying (Mathews; Plumwood, Environmental Culture) characterised by dialogical and communicative openness towards the world.

What we are proposing, then, is an ‘ethics of location’ (Garbutt, ‘Towards an Ethic of Location’; Garbutt, The Locals) or ‘ethics of place’ (Plumwood, ‘Decolonising Australian Gardens’; Plumwood, ‘Shadow Places’) arising within an active and collaborative ‘ethics for decolonisation’ based on principles of situatedness and openness as explicated and advocated by Rose (Reports From a Wild Country). Such an ethics, as Rose has articulated, possesses particular relevance to the settler situation in its rejection of the notions of ‘homogenisation, appropriation, objectification, and manipulation’ (189) so characteristic of settler societies. Further—and of obvious relevance to the preceding discussion—in Rose's conception an ethics for decolonisation necessarily ‘includes our moral engagements with our past and future, and with our ecosystems’ (189). The similarities between the inclusively situated settler disposition we are advocating and the interconnective and relational understandings inherent within Indigenous ontologies as articulated by Graham, Martin and Rose (Nourishing Terrains) amongst others are clear, yet in consideration of settler Australians’ historical appropriation of Indigenous lands and identities under the settler colonial imperatives towards the displacement and replacement of the pre-existing indigenous presence, we must be careful in proceeding. To borrow from Arendt, alongside Rose and Garbutt, what we therefore propose as a potential means of finally and substantively settling settler Australia ‘is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing’ (5) in place.

Alice Robinson lectures in the Bachelor of Writing and Publishing at NMIT in Melbourne. Published widely in print and online, she is a writer of fiction, literary essays and reviews, and co-editor of Australian literary journal Southpaw. Nearing completion, her PhD research consists of a novel and exegesis that together explore attitudes to place and landscape in Australia. Specifically, Alice is interested in the way that settler Australian cultures understand and relate to the Australian landscape, asking what the implications of these understandings and their ecological impacts may be for climate change.
Dan Tout is an Honours candidate at Swinburne University of Technology, where he is researching the structural influences of settler colonialism on the development of Australian nationalism. For the past three years he has also worked as a research assistant at Victoria University in the School of Language & Learning.

Works Cited


Clark, Duncan, and Mike Berners-Lee. ‘What’s the Carbon Footprint of… The Internet?’ *The Guardian* 12 August 2010: n. pag. 6 March 2012.


—. *The Locals: Identity, Place and Belonging in Australia and Beyond*. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2011.


Pyric Other, Pyric Double: Fire Tame, Fire Feral, Fire Extinct

Stephen J. Pyne

Editors’ note: Meteorologists are telling us that La Niña will soon loosen her grip on Australia, and as El Niño gathers strength, we are likely to be entering the period of drought and—inevitably—fire. With this in mind, we asked Stephen Pyne to write an essay about fire in both its loved and unloved personae.

§ Fire is not animate. Most scientists would define it simply as a chemical reaction shaped by its physical surroundings. To regard it as an ‘other’, loved or unloved, or to speculate accordingly about its survival or extinction would seem preposterous. One might as well contemplate the lovedness of carbonic acid or the extinction of rust.

Yet, while not living, fire is a creation of the living world, and shares many of life’s traits. Life creates and sustains fire’s existence: life supplies the oxygen it breathes, life furnishes the fuels that feed it, and life, in the hands of people, overwhelmingly applies the ignition that sparks it into existence. The core reaction itself is a central bio-chemical process that takes apart what photosynthesis puts together. When that occurs within a cell, it’s called respiration; when it happens in the wide world, fire. Because it is an event, not a substance, fire takes its character from its context. It is what its circumstances make it. Those circumstances are largely biotic, pruned by considerations of terrain and weather, and increasingly, they are cultural.

Its alliance with humanity is equally binding. For, while fire has existed on Earth for at least 420 million years, its geography and dynamics have, over the course of the Holocene, aligned more and more closely with those of Homo sapiens. Its importance for people is obvious, recorded endlessly in fire myths: fire made humanity what it is, fire lofted people above their cringing status as hapless scroungers to the top of the food chain. All people have fire, and only people. All our existence humanity has, in fact, enjoyed a species monopoly over fire’s manipulation. Equally, humans have projected fire well beyond the spaces and times allotted by nature. Fire now thrives in places that are otherwise too wet or too dry, or that lack ignition. The relationship has become a symbiosis, with fire as folded into human culture as completely as the Krebs cycle into cells.

§ People have long treated fire as though it were alive, and granted it standing as a symbol of life. Fire is considered living, or dead. It’s kindled: ‘kindle’ has the same etymological origins as ‘kin.’ It’s tended, as we do gardens and children.
It’s domesticated, perhaps our founding act of domestication. (The *domus* is often primarily for the fire, secondarily for people.) The hearth defines the social unit; a family consists of those who share a fireside, the vestal fire is the family fire written on the scale of the state. The family gods are those of the hearth. The tamed fire—the fire in hearth and furnace—is among the most comforting of presences and the most reassuring of emblems. And while not loved *per se*, fire often stands for love’s desires, flaring passionately into flame, or subsiding into dying embers.

Perhaps fire’s closest analogues among creatures are those that endure in both domesticated and wild variants. The ideal might be the dog and wolf. The wild species, the wolf, can exist apart from humanity, and even compete with or threaten people. But the tame species, the dog, is an ancient companion, likely humanity’s first, and one content to lie by a fire. Both fire and dog must be cared for: nurtured, taught, put to use as an extension of humanity’s power. The many breeds of the dog emulate the many calculated expressions of fire: fire as candle, as stove, as heating appliance, as celebratory bonfire, as cleansing burn; the permutations seem endless. And as the domesticated may turn rabid—the tame turn feral—so it is with fire. The danger is real. Societies expend enormous efforts to prevent such accidents (or perversions of the norm) from happening.

Mostly, the tame drives out the wild. The controlled burn replaces the savage. As societies advance technologically, they further refine the process by distilling the fuels, and even the air, into those components that are critical to sustain combustion. Instead of burning wood or straw in a field, they burn wax, diesel or natural gas in candles or combustion chambers. In aboriginal societies, early burning can reclaim landscapes from natural fires; in agricultural settings, fallow burning and cleaning fires replace loosed flames, as the tamed landscape supports tamed burning. In industrial societies even those domesticated fields are gone, and open flame becomes anathema, save in its most confined and symbolic forms, at most a kind of house pet. The only wild fires urbanites in developed countries are likely to see are feral fires from accident, arson, and war, or in virtual forms on television screens.

In this way the saga of fire resembles that of species. In its loved forms—tamed, a tool, a servant, a companion—it has thrived. In its unloved forms—wild, fickle, a dangerous trickster—it has been driven away; in many settings banished into exile. In industrial societies it has vanished from quotidian life. As concerns over global warming accelerate, this trend will likely intensify. It is, after all, humanity’s combustion habits, particularly the replacement of open fire by internal combustion, and the consequent appeal to vast quantities of fossil fuel, that is unhinging the natural rhythms of climate. The free-burning fire, extravagant in its consumption of combustibles and its release of carbon, will
likely be further vilified. The fireplace may join the SUV as a symbol of human fecklessness. The politics of climate may deem open burning too dangerous to leave in the hands of ordinary folk.

§ Over much of planet Earth fire is not in imminent danger of extinction. Lightning still kindles fire aplenty; swidden farmers routinely light fires to clear new plots, and sedentary farmers burn off fallow in regular cycles; graziers set fires as they come and go from distant pastures; fires break free from controlled settings, and run amok. The Earth is an inextinguishably fire planet. Fire will not disappear until life does.

But it is clear that the current dimensions of fire’s geography are set by people, and as people alter their relationship to land so fire will wax and wane. The Holocene has been by and large a time of waxing, as people created favorable circumstances for fire and took their firesticks everywhere. The past century has trended toward rapid waning, as industrial combustion substitutes (or suppresses) open burning. If political measures to contain such combustion as a global threat work, they may lead to a mass replacement of burning of all kinds by sources of power that do not depend on combustion at all. The well-documented decarbonization of energy will make open flame seem even more of a luxury, an embarrassment, and a menace.

There is, however, one grand exception. As industrial societies have established nature preserves, they have created, if inadvertently, habitats for free-burning flame. In fact, much of the impetus for state-sponsored conservation was to protect those lands from abusive burning. Over time, on those sites that had enjoyed a long history of fire, fire proved immune to suppression, but the sheer attempt to remove it proved ecologically destabilizing. More fuels built up, which led to more savage wild fires; flora and fauna that had adapted to particular regimes of burning now found themselves disadvantaged by fire’s removal, or its abrupt transfiguration into more virulent forms. Over and again, nature preserves have found themselves with too much of the wrong kind of fire and not enough of the right.

For several decades, the thrust of policy has been to reinstate fire so it can do the biological work required. There is little argument that fire belongs: the issue is how to do it. Here—even amid what is ostensibly a simple case of restoring wild nature to wild settings—the task has proved vexing. Can we really let wild fire loose? There is little reason to believe flame will remain in its designated preserves, much less its smoke. Are the historic fire regimes the result of nature alone? What about tens of thousands of years of human burning? Should some kind of prescribed burning substitute, or does such obvious manipulation violate the pristine character sought for the protected site? How can reinstigating fire be carbon neutral? Here again fire resembles an organism: it will thrive or
fail depending on its habitat. It will synthesize its surroundings. If those are suitable, fire will do the ecological work desired. If not, not. The issue is not simply putting fire back in, but establishing the context by which it can thrive as we wish.

§ The flip side to restored fire is the surprising revival of wild fire, often on an immense scale. The blame is instinctively placed on global warming; and of course, hot, dry, and windy provides better conditions for burning than cold, wet, and calm. But the underlying dynamics most closely track land use. In this regard, megafires—or megaburning—afflicts both developed and developing nations. In the latter, it accompanies large scale land-clearing; in the former, a massive reconstitution of land use either from abandoned agricultural lands, or from exurban colonization of formerly rural lands, or from the transfer of land to state-sponsored reserves. Here again blame is placed on past practices, notably, fire suppression (or more properly, fire exclusion), which allowed combustibles to stockpile in unnatural caches.

In fact, fire practices are a culprit, but not just those benighted policies of the past. The reclassification of lands for nature preserves is a contributing cause since it has not merely promoted fire but has preferentially encouraged quasi-wild fire. This has boosted burned area—exactly what policy says it wanted. At the same time there is a willingness to tolerate more burning for its ecological benefits and an unwillingness to place firefighters at risk for remote or dubious assets, both of which have also expanded the amount of land burned. It’s the trilogy, contemporary fire’s new triangle—suitable weather, land use that fluffs the scene with combustibles, and fire practices—that account for the scale of burning and its appearance in nations otherwise committed to industrial combustion.

In truth, the three causes are related, and all have as their nuclear core humanity. People oversee the reformation in lands (and their surface fuels); people decide where, when, and how to light fires and fight them; and people are perturbing climate in ways that appear to promote more open burning. Bad burning practices, it would seem, thus lead to even more bad burns. The belief by state-sponsored forestry that it had fire bottled up may be correct, but it turns out that it was a Klein bottle.

§ Fire: feared, savoured, loathed, loved, suppressed, encouraged, sought-after, tolerated, cherished. Like all human categories, fire slips readily into dichotomies. (In his analysis of this human propensity, Claude Levi-Strauss used fire as his foundational exemplar, with the world partitioned into the raw and the cooked.) But more than most phenomena, fire ranges widely through human judgments and sentiments. It is not something we encountered after our formative identity was forged: it was with us, a species heritage, from the
beginning. It is possible to imagine fire without humanity. It is impossible to imagine humanity without fire. Over tens of millennia, our ancient alliance has ripened into symbiosis, until today Earthly fire, while inextinguishable, is all but inextricable from humanity. Each is what it is because of the other. Each has become an odd mirror to the other.

This is worth repeating: fire is what its circumstances make it. And since humanity has become the primary agent, directly and indirectly, of setting fire’s circumstances, the pyric Other that is fire is also a pyric Double. It shows ourselves in its flames. The unloved Other of fire is our unloved Self.

Steve Pyne is a historian and resident pyromantic in the School of Life Sciences at Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, USA. He has written numerous books on the history of fire, environmental history, and the history of exploration.
Common or Garden

Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany
By Matthew Hall

Reviewed by Lorraine Shannon

To open a book review by saying that a major problem facing our beleaguered Earth is the multitude of human persons it struggles to support is, I have to admit, somewhat uninspired. However, a sense of personhood and its categorisation is so fundamental to Matthew Hall’s fascinating and timely book that I will risk a humdrum opening in order to emphasise how crucial personhood is to our estimation of what constitutes a life of value; whether we seek, on the one hand, to restrict it to humans, each with their claim to individuality, a right to the good life, and superiority to other species; or, on the other hand, whether we might consider expanding the borders of personhood to embrace some of the other more-than-human inhabitants of this planet. Of course, to regard ourselves as wholly in charge of such a choice appears, yet again, to place all responsibility and action in the hands of humans. Could this be our over-blown hubris asserting itself yet again, or are we capable of listening and learning from the botanical ‘voices’ that surround us?

For a considerable part of its history Western culture has displayed a great talent for imagining itself to be in charge of all and sundry. Sadly, this fixation on our organising abilities has overshadowed our equal talent for surrender and cooperation. By fostering such underrated abilities, by re-positioning ourselves on the control/surrender spectrum we could begin to re-envision a world in which the simplicity of hierarchies is replaced by collaboration with the complex and unpredictable processes of nature. Such a re-shuffling of ourselves might enable entire ecosystems including humans to flourish in relational, ethical ways. Needless to say, in today’s world this is of paramount importance. Matthew Hall believes a change of attitude is imperative and has set out to consider ways in which Western culture, in particular, might expand its emotional engagement with the natural world in a more inclusive and responsible manner.

This is big, brave thinking but Hall does not over-step the mark and propose unrealistic, utopian solutions to what ails us. Just as animals, especially mammals, have increasingly been seen to possess sentience and personhood, so plants, he argues, may also be accorded a ‘voice’ to promote their right to moral consideration. This book is, therefore, an important and thought-provoking intervention into environmental writing, opening up a field of enquiry that
is both long overdue and essential for the healthy survival of earth, including its more-than-human botanical others. Indeed, this is the premise from which Hall starts: that the natural world is threatened by human activity and as it is plant biomass that enables our continuing existence we need to explore ways of behaving more appropriately towards plants.

Given the ecological crisis facing the planet today, to continue to adhere to beliefs and practices in which plants are mere passive resources can only prove disastrous to all forms of life. It is finding appropriate ways of behaving that is crucial; of recognising an affinity with other beings in the face of clear and obvious alterity. Until now the idea of forming meaningful relationships with members of the plant world would have been classed as absurd and the nitty-gritty of how to relinquish this sense of the absurd and replace it with connectivity is a challenging business. Be assured, however, Hall does not belong to any simplistic ‘new age’ or non-material approach to life, nor does he advocate plant personhood as a form of anthropomorphism. There is no attempt to project human-like qualities where they do not belong. Nor is there any naïve argument that attributes human faculties to plants. Instead, plants are understood as living beings with their own, very different, perspective and with the ability to communicate in their own way. It is by acknowledging a shared volition and intentionality in all natural beings that we can start to work towards attaining a new, all-inclusive understanding of personhood. Hall sets this process in motion by analysing human perception and behaviour towards plants from two opposed perspectives, philosophies of exclusion and philosophies of inclusion, and comes down strongly in favour of inclusion. He asks how we might move from a stance of exclusion and domination to one of inclusion and care and what this might entail for humans as an integral part of ecosystems.

First, we could try focusing on our shared characteristics of life and growth rather than on gross differences. We need, Hall claims, to develop ‘manners of speaking’ that are not concerned with objective truth but are ‘modes of interacting with reality which render our world meaningful and guide our actions therein’ (158). From an ecological perspective, health and well-being are enhanced by increased connectivity and allowing other species and ecosystems to grow and continue their existence. Here, of course, is the catch. Finding appropriate ways to act, to treat plants with respect, is a fraught and contentious business. Hall argues that in the West we can learn from other cultures and religions as well as from those Western discourses that have been relegated to the margins.

To this end, the book is organised into two main sections in which chapters one to three examine Western streams of thought and are in essence a diagnosis of the problem. Chapters four to six are a search for solutions. Hall moves through
a critical analysis of Western philosophy, examining how it moved from animism to Empedocles’ philosophy in which traces of animism still provided recognition of the ontological connection between plants and humans, to philosophies such as Aristotle’s in which the vegetable soul representing botanical life is placed at the bottom of the heap with humans at the apex. Plato, also, was instrumental in developing a hierarchical structure of beings in which plants are portrayed as passive and mindless. They exist not to live and flourish as themselves but to provide food for humans and animals.

Other lesser-known figures are also explored, such as Theophrastus who made detailed observations of the plant world. He deduced that plants should be approached on their own terms as different from animals, having their own goals in life and not existing to satisfy mankind’s needs. Instead plants actively enjoy thriving and seek to fulfil their own purposes. Just as human/animal bonds have formed to the benefit of both parties—people and dogs are one obvious example—so Theophrastus argues that plant cultivation may not necessarily be a form of plant ‘slavery’ but a reciprocal, mutualistic relationship.

Unfortunately, these promising outlooks were side-lined and the philosophical heritage that has been favoured in the West draws on Aristotle and Plato for its view on plants. It can be traced through to the present via such figures as Francis Bacon and the Enlightenment philosophy of Descartes along with Cartesian rationalism. Hall also ranges through the works of prominent early botanists before moving on to examine the ways in which Christian doctrine contributed to the perception of plants as wholly passive, radically other and devoid of the ‘breath of life.’ This negative assessment is balanced by recent developments in eco-theology and leads into the second section that teases out the specific differences among the complex and often contradictory attitudes towards vegetation found in influential Jain, Hindu and Buddhist texts. Inevitably, to cover such a huge canvas, these analyses have been accomplished using broad brush-strokes but they are, nevertheless, more than adequate to back up Hall’s point. Eastern cultures are not reduced to a mere foil for Western shortcomings. There is, for instance, an acknowledgement that discourses relegating plants to passive, inferior status are evident in several major Buddhist schools and in Hindu texts such as the *Vishnu Purana*. Hall ranges through a wide selection of texts and includes Western critiques concerning the appositeness of Eastern philosophies for present-day ecological discourse. In general, though, he presents strong evidence, particularly in the Vedanta school of Hindu philosophy, of a basic sense of the connectivity of all beings. All things, including plants, have shared faculties and emerge from Brahman. All things, including plants, participate in the cycle of death and rebirth. It is here that difficulties may arise
for Western readers unfamiliar with or unsympathetic to ideas on reincarnation as, overall, the various understandings of ontological connectivity tend to revolve around concepts of rebirth, karma and Buddha nature.

Chapter five is more thoroughly grounded in the phenomenal world and has a certain resonance with early, eclipsed Western outlooks. It examines Indigenous animisms with their worldview of interpenetrating plant, animal and human realms. It is this aspect of the book—its analysis of the possibility of a respectful relationship coexisting with human-plant predatory relationships that is, in my opinion, one of the abiding strengths of this book. It refuses romanticisation and squarely faces up to the fact that doing harm to sentient others is unavoidable, indeed an essential part of being alive. How much more comfortable to deny sentience and volition to plants, to feel free to hybridise them as we wish, to plant them in huge monocultures, coat them in chemicals, devour, destroy and waste them as we please. Hall contrasts this simplistic, use-oriented approach to that of animism, understood as a sophisticated way of being in the world and knowing the world. As a relational ontology it claims that acknowledgement of plant personhood and plant use is not incompatible.

It is kinship relationships that provide for inclusion in Indigenous animist societies. Specific, local kinship relationships recognise shared ancestry with other beings and involve obligations of care and responsibility. Part of this responsibility is recognising and accepting that we must inevitably violate the integrity of plant persons; that we cannot avoid killing them. There is no glossing over this stark reality. Life and death, creation and destruction are intertwined and inseparable. This is life at its most real, at its messiest. If we in the West are to reorient our vision of the world and remain mindful of the serious environmental problems facing us, there is no escaping this difficult dilemma—but neither is there a need for breast-beating, hair-shirts and repentance. Taking the life of plant persons is an integral part of being in the world and a necessary part of living. However, the harm done cannot be ignored. The solution, Hall argues, is to avoid waste, misuse, utilitarianism and over-consumption and to foster awareness of plant persons as part of the social fabric. We need to substitute hierarchy with heterarchy. We need to re-conceptualise animist notions of transformation from one phase of life to another from an ecological perspective. And ‘new’ animism, along with ‘new’ paganism is attempting to do just that. Hall cites Graham Harvey’s *Animism* along with contemporary Paganism as hopeful signs that Western cultures are re-examining old notions and re-appropriating them in order to bring about positive change. Moreover, he argues, they may have allies in the scientific community. ‘The view of plant scientists’, Hall writes, ‘is changing so rapidly that botanical texts may soon serve Earth-based religions for inspiration as much as the pre-Christian scriptures’ (135).
What follows is a fascinating chapter of data from the botanical sciences. It documents evidence that contradicts beliefs in the ‘inferior’ attributes of plants, such as lack of movement, sensation and mentality. Although some of the findings outlined in this chapter remain contentious, they present a strong argument for recognising the capacities and capabilities of the plant kingdom. Hall traces from Darwin such ideas as plant perception, communication and movement before examining contemporary research in the plant sciences in which plant intelligence, reasoning and problem solving are posited.

Overall, this book is a ‘must read’ for anyone interested in the state of the environment today, whether professionally or as a concerned citizen. It does not simplify the issues but has managed to attain that elusive balance between remaining accessible and readable without sacrificing intellectual range, subtlety and complexity of thought. Perhaps I can summarise my thoughts on this book by simply saying this is a book I wish I had written.

*Lorraine Shannon is an independent scholar and writer. She has a PhD in postcolonial studies and a non-traditional PhD in ecology and writing. She is a member of Kangaloon creative ecologies.*