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Introduction: on the critical importance of colonial formations

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Abstract

In 1921 the National Geographic Magazine published a special issue on 'The Islands of the Pacific'. Richly illustrated with photographs, as was the hallmark of the magazine, the issue also featured a map produced as a special colour supplement (see Figure 1). In his introductory essay for the edition, J.P. Thomson, C.B.E., LL.D., who was the Honorary Secretary and Treasurer of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, referred readers directly to this map, so they might situate themselves within what he assumed would be an unfamiliar geography for most. He also included a detailed written description of 'this Polynesian Empire, if I may so call it' which 'extends across the Pacific from the eastern waters of Australia and New Guinea for a hundred degrees of longitude to Easter Island', listing all of the major island groups and 'numerous clusters of islands, reefs, and lagoons scattered over wide expanses of tropical ocean'.¹

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Introduction: On the Critical Importance of Colonial Formations

Jane Carey and Frances Steel¹

In 1921 the *National Geographic Magazine* published a special issue on ‘The Islands of the Pacific’. Richly illustrated with photographs, as was the hallmark of the magazine, the issue also featured a map produced as a special colour supplement. In his introductory essay for the edition, J.P. Thomson, C.B.E., LL.D., who was the Honorary Secretary and Treasurer of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, referred readers directly to this map – so they might situate themselves within what he assumed would be an unfamiliar geography for most. He also included a detailed written description of ‘this Polynesian Empire, if I may so call it’ which ‘extends across the Pacific from the eastern waters of Australia and New Guinea for a hundred degrees of longitude to Easter Island’, listing all of the major island groups and ‘numerous clusters of islands, reefs, and lagoons scattered over wide expanses of tropical ocean.’²

The map supplement also emphasised empire, but from a quite different perspective. It, too, included all of the ‘Islands of the Pacific’, but these were overlaid with ‘Sovereignty and Mandate Lines in 1921’. Indeed, these lines dominated the map. Assigning a different colour to each of the imperial powers in the Pacific (Japan, the US, France, the Netherlands, Britain, Australia and New Zealand) thick borders partitioned islands and sea. In this representation, the land mass of Australia looms large (although depicted at an atypical angle, as if acted on by the ‘weight’ of the Pacific) and New Zealand particularly assumes a new prominence, exceeding the conventional mapping of its three main islands. Great Britain’s possessions are centrally positioned, but it is not especially dominant in the region, with Australia and New Zealand mapped as distinct and equivalent imperial powers, rather than encompassed within the British Empire as a whole (as typically identified by the same shade of red on world maps at the time). China and the mainland United States are relegated to either side of the top corners of the map just peeping into view, almost as afterthoughts, belying their continental proportions. If the thick sovereignty and mandate boundary lines implied clear divisions of territory and authority, a series of fainter lines indicated something different. They represented the various cable lines of the region. These cut across the partitioned Pacific, creating numerous connections that defied these seemingly solid borders.

This map, in centring island territories under colonial rule and decentering distant imperial metropolises, offers a suggestive visual cue for this special issue of *History Australia* on ‘colonial formations’. Our focus here is on colonial dynamics in their local and regional aspects alongside the more studied arena of ‘imperial formations’. We continue the work of taking empire seriously from its so-called peripheries. In decentering the British metropole,

¹ We would like to acknowledge the Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts at the University of Wollongong for its support of the Centre for Colonial and Settler Studies. We have had the good fortune to work with the editorial team at *History Australia* and greatly appreciate their advice and support throughout the preparation of ‘Colonial Formations’, particularly Catherine Kevin. We would also like to thank the contributors for their hard work under various time pressures and constraints, and to all of those who have reviewed manuscripts for this special issue.

² J.P. Thomson, ‘The Islands of the Pacific’, *National Geographic* XL, no. 6 (1921): 549. Thomson was a self-trained, ‘amateur’ geographer, who began his career as surveyor: W. S. Kitson, ‘Thomson, James Park (1854–1941)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/thomson-james-park-8797/text15427>, published first in hardcopy 1990.

while shedding light on its enduring power, contributors variously chart mobilities and connections across different colonial spaces – predominantly the Australasian colonies, as well as in their relation to islands in the Pacific, to India, and to China. Read together, the articles in this special issue operate across a wider Asia-Pacific regional arena to connect historiographies and diverse colonialisms that are so often discussed separately.

These articles are animated by border crossings and the intermixing of diverse peoples, whether in contexts of labour, education, touring, courtrooms or anticolonial struggles. These processes, as we are concerned to unpack, stimulated attention to questions of belonging and its limits – from cultures of sociability, to citizenship and its attendant benefits and rights. Contributors chart the trajectories of ideas, experiences, and claims of colonial belonging and the associated boundary work. They explore how colonised peoples, both Indigenous and ‘coloured’ migrants, mobilised, challenged and critiqued imposed strictures on their life possibilities, both in individual colonies, in cross-colonial networks and across the imperial arena, and beyond.

Many of the articles in this special issue had their origins in the conference *Colonial Formations: Connections and Collisions*, held at the University of Wollongong in November 2016. This was the inaugural conference of the Centre for Colonial and Settler Studies (CASS), established at the University in 2015.³ CASS was formed to bring together interdisciplinary research in the history, theoretical framing and contemporary manifestations of colonialism, with a predominant focus on Australia, the Asia Pacific region and the wider British Empire. Members are drawn from history, literary studies, cultural studies and art theory, with sub-disciplinary expertise in economic history, the study of emotions, mobility and Indigenous studies. CASS particularly fosters work that places colonial and settler colonial formations in comparative and connected frames of analysis, and promotes collaboration between scholars of diverse colonialisms. In doing so it seeks to interrogate a range of claims that are commonly made about the distinctiveness of specific colonial formations.

The conference theme encapsulated the broad aims of CASS, and allowed participants to explore a range of historical, contemporary and interdisciplinary perspectives. The framing sub-themes of ‘connections’ and ‘collisions’ encouraged enquiry into processes of borrowing, negotiation and collaboration on the one hand, and contestation, conflict and Indigenous resurgence and mobilisation on the other.⁴ The articles gathered here continue this discussion of the critical importance of colonial formations.

Our focus on ‘colonial formations’ emerges in conversation with, and reaction to, key trends that have come to dominate approaches to history writing over the past two decades. As Ann Curthoys has noted, in the 1990s the ‘yearning to escape the national boundaries that mark history-writing seem[ed] to be shared by historians in many places.’⁵ Since then a series of

³ See <https://www.uowblogs.com/cass/>

⁴ For a conference report, see Adam J. Barker’s blog post, ‘Reflections on Colonial Formations’, <http://www.uowblogs.com/cass/2017/11/10/reflections-on-colonial-formations/>

⁵ Ann Curthoys, ‘We’ve Just Started Making National Histories and You Want Us to Stop Already?’, in *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 70. As Curthoys further noted, this was not simply the result of shifting theoretical paradigms, but equally ‘a desire among us historians to communicate our craft beyond

paradigm shifts have radically reshaped the terrain of historical scholarship. Two major shifts particularly emerged which sought to break through national borders. The juggernaut of transnational history, alongside and in cross-fertilization with the rise to dominance of the 'new imperial history', has produced a vast array of scholarship that moves beyond the apparently distorting limitations of national and colonial borders as the basis for writing history. Instead, this work traces mobilities, circulations and flows of people, ideas, objects, capital, commodities and technologies across borders. In the fields of colonial and imperial history a range of new interventions deploying these methods have simultaneously sought to de-centre the metropole, provincialise Europe, or bring centre and periphery into the same analytical frame.⁶

Our purpose in this brief introduction is not to provide a comprehensive overview of all of the literature that has contributed to these developments. Rather, we pick up on some of the key moments and objectives that inspired these shifts, and recent debates that have begun to raise questions about the directions this scholarship has taken, and suggest new arenas that remain underexplored.

In 1990 Shula Marks' landmark essay 'History, the Nation and Empire: Sniping from the Periphery', expressed reservations about the 'nation' and 'national identity', particularly 'what seems to be a distorting insularity about the[se] conception[s]'. Reflecting on the recent introduction of a new national history curriculum in Britain, Marks outlined 'the divorce between imperial and British history' that had taken place in the years since WWII, coinciding with decolonization: 'With the loss of empire, so imperial history has lost its coherence.'⁷ The following year, Ian Tyrrell (a founding figure of transnational history) similarly chided American historians for their insularity – an adherence to models of 'American exceptionalism' had meant US historians felt no need to engage with scholarship from elsewhere, even for the pre-revolutionary colonial period: 'nowhere has a nation-centered historical tradition been more resilient than in the United States.' 'History', he argued 'is not a set of data to be deposited into tidy boxes, of which the national box is the most obvious and sensible.'⁸ He enjoined US historians to recognize and pursue the transnational connections that had shaped the American nation, including its imperial past.

It was not only metropolitan scholars who were chafing at the limitations of the nation as the basis for their work. In 1986, Pacific historian Donald Denoon reflected that 'The decline of imperial publishing has stranded Australian [historians] like shags on a rock.'⁹ He bemoaned

national boundaries. We are chafing at the international bit, wanting international readers to engage with our ideas and dilemmas ... At least I am': 70.

⁶ See for example the introduction and various essay collected in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), and of course Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁷ Shula Marks, 'History, the Nation and Empire: Sniping from the Periphery', *History Workshop*, no. 29 (1990): 111-2.

⁸ Ian Tyrrell. 'American exceptionalism in an age of international history', *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (1991): 1031, 1033.

⁹ Donald Denoon, 'The Isolation of Australian History', *Australian Historical Studies* 22, no. 87 (1986): 252. Denoon began his career as an historian of South Africa at in the 1960s. His early career was thus framed by the emergence of 'nation-based histories' as 'perhaps an inevitable consequence of the foundation of national universities in newly independent African countries. One of the demands made of historians in that environment is to provide a history of the nation.' Donald Denoon and

the 'isolation of Australian history' which reflected both the inward-looking stance adopted by Australian historians, alongside the 'decline and fall of British Imperial and Commonwealth history' as a 'wider framework' that had previously provided 'an obvious niche for Australian history'. With the decline of the imperial frame there was no obvious wider 'container' into which Australia could be inserted: 'The popular division of the world into North and South leaves Australia as an anomaly; and Australia is equally awkward in either the First or the Second or the Third World.'¹⁰ Denoon himself had recently proposed a new model of 'settler capitalist societies', which he observed had 'received the usual polite response of Australian scholars when outsiders express an interest.'¹¹ Denoon was concerned that no scholars outside of Australia were at all interested in Australian history. He for one clearly wanted to engage in larger, global conversations.

Denoon drew in part on British historian David Fieldhouse who had recently decried the disintegration of British imperial history into a series of separate national histories of the new states that had emerged through decolonisation. European historians had also, therefore, 'turned inwards again and studied their own countries as individual nation states'. Thus 'European and "Third World" historians [had] combined to break the tablets on which the traditional imperial history had been written.'¹² Scholars from the former colonies had their own agendas, disengaged from, and often hostile to, metropolitan scholarship.

Shula Marks further noted that imperial history for the most part remained 'history from above'. The 'periphery' she referred to in her provocative title was thus not necessarily geographic. Rather it signalled the exclusions that flowed from academic hierarchies within Britain, and the continuing subordination of approaches which centralised race and gender.¹³ In the UK, a wave of new scholarship in British imperial history, much of it by feminist and women's historians, began to redress precisely these exclusions.

The 'new imperial history', as it has come to be termed, sought to demonstrate the 'formative impact of empire on the imperial metropole ... [and] to situate the history of Britain within an imperial framework' as Mrinalini Sinha put it. She contended:

The dominant 'centrifugal' mode of analysis, which studies the radiation of imperial influence from the metropole to the colonies, is now being complemented with more 'centripetal' analyses of the impact of imperialism 'at home.'¹⁴

This was reflected in the work of key scholars including Catherine Hall, Antoinette Burton and Kathleen Wilson.¹⁵ But this new work did not simply re-envisage the relationship

Adam Kuper, 'Nationalist Historians in Search of a Nation: The "new historiography" in Dar es Salaam', *African Affairs* 69, no. 277 (1970): 329.

¹⁰ Denoon, 'The Isolation of Australian History', 252-3. Denoon omitted the category of the Fourth World which had been developed by Indigenous activists and scholars in the late 1970s to describe precisely settler societies including Australia: George Manuel and Michael Posluns, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1974).

¹¹ Denoon, 'The Isolation of Australian History', 253. Donald Denoon, *Settler Capitalism: The Dynamics of Dependent Development in the Southern Hemisphere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

¹² David Fieldhouse, 'Can Humpty-Dumpty Be Put Together Again? Imperial History in the 1980s', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 12, no. 2 (1984): 10.

¹³ Marks, 'Sniping from the Periphery', 112.

¹⁴ Mrinalini Sinha, 'Britain and the Empire: Toward A New Agenda for Imperial History', *Radical History Review*, no. 72 (1998): 163.

between metropole and colony. It drew on new arenas of theory and interdisciplinary influences that were antithetical to the empirical commitments of many ‘traditional’ historians. As Kathleen Wilson puts it, the new imperial history deploys ‘feminist, literary, postcolonial, and non-Western perspectives and utilizes local knowledges to reassess the relations of power underwriting and sustaining perceptions of modernity.’¹⁶

New spatial and networked approaches also emerged, providing important new understandings of the range of official and unofficial networks on which colonial governance relied, and how webs of connection formed horizontally between different colonial sites, rather than only via the metropole.¹⁷ Beyond offering new insights into the dynamics of empire, Alan Lester’s work particularly makes important spatial interventions – as he notes, ‘networked approaches ... emerged explicitly as a way of circumventing the *a priori* imposition of any particular spatial container’.¹⁸

After decades of deliberate separation, encouraged by the seeming commitment of the new imperial history paradigm to expansive inclusion and reciprocity, scholars of the former British colonies thus began to re-engage with metropolitan imperial scholarship. The colonies emerged as sites of innovation and experimentation – with colonial inventions circulating and impacting the centre, and cross fertilizing horizontally as well. Thus, even in 1998, Sinha could suggest that perhaps the ‘sniping from the periphery’ was finally being heard.¹⁹

However, ‘those of us who write from and about the “periphery”’, as Jane Carey and Jane Lydon have emphasised, can forget that the new imperial historiography is ‘primarily concerned with the metropolis’, and that ‘the colonies are still being used for metropolitan purposes ... rather than being treated as significant sites in and of themselves’.²⁰ Durba Ghosh has similarly reflected that ‘Many scholars have noted that the new imperial history does a

¹⁵ See for example Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830–1867* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002); Kathleen Wilson, ed. *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, eds., *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Kathleen Wilson, ‘Old Imperialisms and New Imperial Histories: Rethinking the History of the Present’, *Radical History Review*, no. 95 (2006): 212.

¹⁷ Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001); Zoë Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections 1815–45: Patronage, the Information Revolution and Colonial Government* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

¹⁸ Alan Lester, ‘Spatial Concepts and the Historical Geographies of British Colonialism’, in *Writing Imperial Histories*, ed. Andrew Thompson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 125.

¹⁹ Sinha, ‘Britain and the Empire’, 164.

²⁰ Jane Carey and Jane Lydon, ‘Introduction: Indigenous Networks: Historical Trajectories and Contemporary Connections’, in *Indigenous Networks: Mobility, Connections and Exchange* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 6.

great job of telling us about Britain ... but it is relatively less informative about Africa, Asia, or Latin America' – or, we might add, the Pacific.²¹ Reading this agenda at the most cynical level, one could suggest that the 'new imperial history' is simply another guise for British scholars to continue talking about, and among, themselves. But we need not deem this a 'failure' nor 'declare the end of the imperial turn', Ghosh suggests, but instead 'examine where future imperial turns might take us, particularly as we imagine a way to decolonise historical scholarship from its Europe-centered moorings.'²²

As early as 1984, Fieldhouse had urged that, rather than a narrow 'metrocentric approach', it was 'essential to see imperialism as a double-ended process, in which the colonies play as dynamic a role as the metropolis.' He concluded that the 'colonies' must be studied 'in their own right' and 'from within'.²³ This echoes J.W. Davidson's vision for Pacific history, one that rejected overarching frames of European imperial expansion narrated from distant metropolitan capitals, for an island-centred focus on local 'multi-cultural situations'.²⁴ Fieldhouse particularly advocated the study of interactions 'between the component parts of imperial systems' as the most productive path forward for new forms of imperial history.²⁵ As Sinha herself observed, 'It can never be enough ... simply to document the impact of imperialism within Britain.'²⁶ While welcoming this development, she argued that this is 'by no means a sufficient basis for a radical agenda for imperial history' particularly if this simply served as 'a resource for rethinking the Western Self'.²⁷ Robert McLain thus asks: does empire only matter in terms of its effects on those living at the center of power? What about its effects on the hundreds of millions of royal subjects? Should the Indians, Africans, Irish, and white colonial settlers who vastly outnumbered the citizens of the metropole fade into the past, back to where they were when whiggish historical interpretations reigned supreme?²⁸

Antoinette Burton goes further in this vein of critique: 'even a "reformed" imperial history is still imperial history because it does not imagine non-Western subjects except as colonial subjects.' Moreover, despite its claims to expansiveness, the new imperial history retained an 'India-centric' nature - what Burton refers to as the 'doubly imperial character of a British imperial history in which the Raj is the presumed center.'²⁹ Large portions of the empire do not feature significantly. Moreover, colonised peoples, particularly the Indigenous peoples of settler societies, often remain only superficially sketched. As much as the new imperial history has engaged with postcolonial scholarship, it has not taken on board its key imperative regarding the centrality of 'native' or subaltern voices and experiences. And it has

²¹ Durba Ghosh, 'Another Set of Imperial Turns?', *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 3 (2012): 773.

²² Ghosh, 'Imperial Turns?', 773.

²³ David Fieldhouse, 'Can Humpty-Dumpty Be Put Together Again? Imperial History in the 1980s', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 12, no. 2 (1984): 22.

²⁴ J.W. Davidson, 'Problems of Pacific History', *Journal of Pacific History* 1, no. 1 (1966): 10.

²⁵ Fieldhouse, 'Imperial History in the 1980s', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 12, no. 2 (1984): 10.

²⁶ Mrinalini Sinha, 'Teaching Imperialism as a Social Formation', *Radical History Review*, no. 67 (1997): 178.

²⁷ Sinha, 'Britain and the Empire', 164. She is quoting Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani, 'Crosscurrents, Crosstalk: Race, "Postcoloniality" and the Politics of Location', *Cultural Studies* 7, no. 2 (1993): 301.

²⁸ Robert McLain, *Gender and Violence in British India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 121.

²⁹ Antoinette Burton, 'Introduction: Imperial Optics: Empire Histories, Interpretive Methods', in her *Empire in Question: Reading, Writing, and Teaching British Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 16-7.

yet to engage with the piercing critiques emerging from a new wave of Indigenous studies scholarship. Work by Audra Simpson, Jodi Byrd and Kehaulani Kauanui, among many others, rejects or ‘refuses’ the frames through which Indigenous lives and sovereignties have been read by ‘others’.³⁰

Outlining the various debates in the field in 2010, Stephen Howe described the ‘family’ of British imperial history scholars as ‘large, quarrelsome, and perhaps quite dysfunctional; while some members seem not to talk to one another at all.’³¹ The major ‘split’ remains between geopolitical and economic approaches to empire, and the cultural history approaches of new imperial history.³² ‘Depending on which scholars you ask and in which subfields of history you read’, Durba Ghosh observed, ‘the “imperial turn” and its close cognate, the “new imperial history,” are either in decline or just emerging.’³³ This reflection continues to hold true. Indeed, the new imperial history seems to be in retreat. Many of its most prominent exponents have recently turned back to the nation (or the metropole), withdrawing from their previous expansive engagements with scholars and scholarship from elsewhere.

Our theme of ‘colonial formations’ obviously speaks in relation, and reaction, to the much more studied arena of ‘imperial social formations’ which also has its origins in the work of Mrinalini Sinha and the broader field of the new imperial history.³⁴ It also responds to a quite separate arena where the concept of ‘colonial formations’, and connections between different colonial sites, has emerged strongly – settler colonial studies. This field too emerged in the 1990s when ‘a range of scholars began to view the singular category of ‘colonialism’ as too blunt a tool.’³⁵ They argued that colonies where the settlers ‘came to stay’ were distinctive colonial formations with specific dynamics that required separate interrogation.³⁶ This field also has grown exponentially. And while its early focus was on the British settler colonies, it has since expanded to look well beyond this sphere, creating connections between diverse geographical and temporal locations. Settler colonial studies too has been the subject of significant critique from a number of different directions. But for our purposes, it is the critiques of its ‘silencing’ effects that are the most relevant. Settler colonialism is not hermetically sealed off from other modes of imperialism. In the Pacific context, as Tracey Banivanua Mar has argued, ‘in spite of the imposed distinction drawn between settler and

³⁰ J. Kehaulani Kauanui, *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the politics of sovereignty and indigeneity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

³¹ Stephen Howe, ‘Introduction: New Imperial Histories’, in his ed., *The New Imperial Histories Reader* (London: Routledge, 2010), 9.

³² For discussion of this ongoing, sometimes acrimonious division, see the roundtable discussion of John Darwin’s book *The Empire Project* in the *Journal of British Studies* 54, no. 4 (2015), particularly Alan Lester, ‘Comment: Geostrategy (and Violence) in the Making of the Modern World’, 977-983.

³³ Ghosh, ‘Imperial Turns?’, 772.

³⁴ Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*.

³⁵ Penelope Edmonds and Jane Carey, ‘A New Beginning for Settler Colonial Studies’, *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 1 (2013): 2.

³⁶ The scholarship is vast but see for example Patrick Wolfe’s definition of settler colonialism originally set forward in ‘Nation and Miscegenation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era’, *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, no. 36 (1994): 93–152.

other colonies, Indigenous and colonised peoples have found and built networks and bridges across imagined colonial divides.³⁷

If we return to consider the colour supplement map of the islands of the Pacific discussed earlier, it places the Australasian settler colonies in their wider Pacific regional arena. This mapping is also cognate with the ‘island-centred’ scholarship of Pacific history that originally developed at the Australian National University from the 1950s. This occurred largely in parallel to the emergent national historiographies of Australia and New Zealand, despite early forays into the study of settler colonial regional ‘sub-imperialisms’.³⁸ This partitioning of histories of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands, and the myopic ‘monograph’ effects of the latter, immersed in ‘internal complexities’, as K.R. Howe critiqued, have since been challenged. Newer work has attended to what Howe advocated: a ‘wider geographic, economic and political’ framing of the Pacific which involved ‘its adjacent shores,’ so as to avoid parcelling out seemingly-autonomous regions ‘for purposes of historical investigation’.³⁹ This has generated a rich body of work on the networks that connected colonial sites and settler states in the Pacific, including with respect to American insular imperialism.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the Pacific is increasingly approached through ever-more expansive perspectives of world, global, oceanic and environmental histories that seek to integrate islands, rim, and ocean and advance ‘pan-Pacific histories’.⁴¹ But these approaches have also revealed tensions and generated questions about ‘knowing Oceania’, for they can mark a kind of belated discovery of the Pacific from centres of power largely ‘off the map’. Moreover, ‘broad synoptic accounts’ typically struggle to ‘communicate the particularities of place’, as Tony Ballantyne puts it,⁴² and risk sweeping over longer traditions of locally-generated scholarship, and the deep histories of Pacific Island peoples themselves across many ‘native seas’.⁴³

³⁷ Tracey Banivanua Mar, ‘Author’s Response: Transcendent Mobilities’, in ‘Review Forum: *Decolonisation and the Pacific*’, *Journal of Pacific History* 51, no. 4 (2016): 461. See also Tracey Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

³⁸ Angus Ross, *New Zealand Aspirations in the Pacific in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964); Roger C. Thompson, *Australian Imperialism in the Pacific: The expansionist era, 1820-1920* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1980).

³⁹ Kerry R. Howe, ‘Pacific Islands History in the 1980s: New Directions or Monograph Myopia?’ *Pacific Studies* 3, no. 1 (1979): 81-90, here 88. See also K.R. Howe, ‘Two Worlds?’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, 37, no.1 (2003): 50-61.

⁴⁰ Recent monographs include, Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific*; Patricia O’Brien, *Tautai: Sāmoa, World History, and the life of Ta’isi O.F. Nelson* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2017); Katerina Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island: Stories of People and Phosphate from Banaba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014); Frances Steel, *Oceania Under Steam: Sea Transport and the Cultures of Colonialism, c. 1870-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Gary Y. Okihiro, *Island World: A History of Hawai’i and the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁴¹ David Armitage and Alison Bashford, ‘Introduction: The Pacific and its Histories’, in *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People*, ed. Armitage and Bashford (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 7.

⁴² Tony Ballantyne, ‘Perspectival Histories’, in ‘Review Forum: *Pacific Histories: ocean, land, people*’, *Journal of Pacific History*, 50, no. 2 (2015): 234.

⁴³ Damon Salesa, ‘The Pacific in Indigenous Time’, in *Pacific Histories*, 31-52. See also Damon Salesa ‘The World from Oceania’, in *A Companion to World History*, ed. Douglas Northrop (Chichester, 2012), 392–404; Epeli Hau’ofa, ‘Our Sea of Islands,’ *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol. 6,

This brief overview thus indicates ongoing critical reflection about where and how the particular and the general meet in our work, and which scales and optics are the most meaningful, and for whom. Contributors to this special issue start to explore some of these pressing issues from a range of perspectives, all of which focus specifically on negotiated colonial formations beyond the British metropole.

The opening two articles are situated in Indigenous history – a field that is still too rarely incorporated into broader colonial much less imperial histories. Both trace the persistence of Indigenous world views (in Aboriginal Australia and Aotearoa) in the face of settler inundation, via seemingly unlikely sources. Paula Byrne observes this in missionary and court records that have more typically been read as evidence of the growth of settler power, and thus the destruction of Indigenous identities and sovereignties. Her article on Aboriginal encounters with the NSW Bar from 1830-66, reads the records of the NSW Supreme Court alongside those of the ‘erratic Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld’, a missionary who was based at Lake Macquarie near Newcastle. Byrne highlights how, despite the apparent weight of the forces against them, Aboriginal people ‘creatively negotiated’ their way through the NSW legal system, in ways that indicated an incorporation of British law into Indigenous systems rather than the reverse. She observes that ‘in reading Threlkeld’s letters and reports we discover that white people were not at all the centre of the Indigenous world, there were other complex Aboriginal-centric concerns.’ Local magistrates too were ‘drawn into an Aboriginal view of dispute resolution ... [often] acting on behalf of one group against another.’

Such observations remind us that there remained significant realms that are not captured by imperial or colonial models (or national ones for that matter). As Shino Konishi notes, scholars have usually viewed nineteenth-century Indigenous lives ‘exclusively through the prism of colonialism’, or their ‘relations to non-Indigenous society’.⁴⁴ Similarly, Alice Te Punga Somerville and Daniel Heath Justice observe that biographies of Indigenous people are ‘too often studied for how they engage colonial subjects rather than for the ways they center their own contexts and concerns both within and beyond settler colonialism.’⁴⁵ These articles provide further demonstration of the ‘incomplete’ nature of colonial rule. They implicitly challenge some of the approaches adopted by metropolitan scholars of the new imperial history which often fail to take Indigenous worlds seriously, on their own terms, and illustrate why they need to do so.

In this vein, Jane Carey examines a walking tour undertaken by three elite Māori schoolboys in 1892 to ‘save their race from extinction’. They were students at Te Aute College, an elite Anglican boarding school for Māori boys, and as such their activities have often been read as promoting the assimilatory project of the settler state. Through a close reading of two accounts of the walk produced by its leader, Rēweti Kōhere, Carey instead emphasises the centrality of Māori self-determination and autonomy. Moreover, she reads the significance of this journey not simply for its local resonance in marking the earliest origins of the Young

no. 1 (1994), pp. 148-61; Matt K. Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds: A History of Seas, Peoples and Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴⁴ Shino Konishi, ‘Making Connections and Attachments: Writing the Lives of Two Nineteenth-Century Aboriginal Men’, *Biography* 39, no. 3 (2016): 411.

⁴⁵ Alice Te Punga Somerville and Daniel Heath Justice, ‘Introduction: Indigenous Conversations about Biography’, *Biography* 39, no. 3 (2016): 241.

Māori Party – one of the most significant Māori organisations of the early twentieth century – but for its potentially wider implications. Responding to the ‘insularity’ of New Zealand historiography in general, and Māori history in particular, she seeks to connect this expedition with ‘Indigenous histories elsewhere’. Rather than looking only to the obvious sphere of cognate settler colonies, Carey suggests that wider colonial historiography and circulations are also pertinent, and in ways that ‘can amplify the importance of local histories’.

The following three articles by Kate Bagnall, Peter Prince and Margaret Allen all revolve around ‘non-white’ belonging in white Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. All highlight how Australian experiences were shaped by wider connections and exchanges, relating particularly to the rights accorded to ‘non-white’, ‘natural born British’ subjects, but they equally reflect the quite specific colonial formation of White Australia. In this respect they make significant contributions to the burgeoning field of legal histories of empire, and reflect what Antoinette Burton has characterised as: ‘the circuitous intra-colonial routes and unlooked for intra-imperial borrowings that shape much of what we recognize as the basis for modern law and citizenship.’⁴⁶

The articles by Bagnall and Prince both address Chinese Australian history, from linked but very different perspectives. Bagnall adopts a biographical approach, narrating the story of James Minahan, son of a Chinese father and white Australian mother who was arrested under the Immigration Restriction Act in 1908 on attempting to return to Australia as an adult, having left the colony as a small child. Bagnall uses the various court cases Minahan defended and won, alongside other fragmentary sources, to reconstruct his life story. Although the significance of Minahan’s case is well established in migration and legal history, her approach ‘foregrounds the unfolding of decisions and their implications, in real time as it were, for the historical subjects involved’, and seeks to ‘reveal something of the subjective experience of immigration law and policy, as well as the biases in its operation.’ Bagnall shows that the law was ‘one way that Chinese Australians could challenge racialised policies of exclusion’ and assert their belonging.

Peter Prince focusses on a range of laws and court cases, alongside census records, to document the ‘wrongful labelling’ of Chinese Australians ‘as “aliens”, “coloured aliens”, “outsiders” or those who did not belong.’ Although historians have long recognised the unlawful denigration of Chinese Australians as ‘aliens’, Prince demonstrates the under-appreciated extent of their illegal treatment. Noting that at least until 1949, a large proportion of Chinese Australians were in fact ‘natural born British subjects’ and thus ‘had equal status under the law with white settlers’, he shows how both courts and legislation wrongly presumed any person of ‘Chinese appearance’ could simply be assumed to be an ‘alien’. This is particularly evident not only in the use of ‘the “fiction” of the dictation test’, but in ‘subordinate rules, such as industrial awards, not subject to imperial scrutiny.’ He concludes that this is ‘significant not only for re-imagining the historical place of the Chinese in Australia but also, more broadly, for assessing the continuing belief that modern Australia was built on the rule of law.’

As both Prince and Bagnall demonstrate, Chinese Australians vigorously defended their rights and protested against their illegal treatment. So too, Indian Australians used their status as British subjects to argue for greater rights in White Australia as Margaret Allen explores.

⁴⁶ Antoinette Burton, ‘Introduction’, 18.

Their protests, although sporadic, not only reveal ‘a common consciousness of their rights’ but demonstrate ‘their engagement with a transnational movement of resistance against discriminatory racial legislation.’ Allen too observes how ‘Australian legislators had ignored the special status of non-European British subjects’, including Indians, in framing the constitution. Indians in Australia also looked to the law to protect them and they ‘challenged the legitimacy of Australian policies both directly and by appeals to the Crown, the British Government and even to the Privy Council.’ Moreover, ‘Aware of the imperial dimensions of their struggles for civil and political rights, they forged links across empire with political organisations in India and in Britain itself.’ Conversely, with few exceptions, Indians did not mobilise in a shared struggle with ‘Aboriginal natives of Asia, Africa and the Pacific Islands’ to protest their classification as prohibited immigrants, and indeed they regarded Chinese and Japanese ‘as racially their inferiors.’ Despite their efforts, and the illegality of their treatment, their status as British was never truly recognised.

In light of the growing attention to the Pacific in world and global historical frames, there is still rich potential for finer-grained analyses of translocal and transcolonial connections and the resultant colonial formations. This is reflected for instance in renewed attention to New Zealand’s island empire, whether imagined or aspirational, formal or informal. Articles here by Frances Steel and Nicholas Hoare shed new light on ways of reading these entangled pasts through individual lives, notably those who lived or worked between islands, and who variously challenged race power and imposed hierarchies in contexts of anticolonial agitation or in the more intimate domestic sphere.

Steel highlights instances of male servants moving between Fiji and New Zealand from the 1880s, either in support of their Fiji-based employers, or recruited to serve British settlers in New Zealand. These servants included Indigenous Fijians, as well as Melanesians and Indians who first entered Fiji under terms of plantation indenture. Their visibility in white settler society inevitably stimulated debate about the gendered and racialised domestic order. But Steel is also concerned to explore how marginalised individuals challenged the limits of belonging in White New Zealand, in ways not dissimilar across the Tasman, by pursuing redress in the courts and building their own community networks. Furthermore, as she shows, the advent of more restrictive immigration policies in New Zealand did not wholly terminate non-white traffic from the islands; temporary, short-term or circular mobilities persisted. In highlighting these ongoing entanglements, Steel illuminates the place of Fiji as a cross-roads or mediating site of Indian and Pacific ocean colonial influences in New Zealand history, as well as the broader regional ‘afterlives’ of plantation indenture.

By extending Leela Gandhi’s perspectives on ‘dissident cross-cultural collaboration’ in the British metropole to the Pacific periphery, Nicholas Hoare focuses on a number of domestic critics of New Zealand empire in the Pacific. He examines the nature of the friendships they forged with prominent members of the Sāmoan Mau movement and the Cook Islands Progressive Association. Non-conformist figures in post-WWI New Zealand were able to bridge divides between metropole and colony, as they were already one step removed from ‘mainstream’ Pākehā society and keenly aware of, and affected by, its strictures and prejudices. Yet Hoare does not paint a seamless picture of collaborative struggle; these friendships were difficult to sustain and subject to pressures and constraints, some imposed from without, but others generated from within. Hoare shows also that the islands formally under New Zealand’s jurisdiction could still be cast as distant and troublesome, and routine mobility between them, rather than affirming a wider appreciation of archipelagic or oceanic belonging, might call into question one’s presumed allegiance to ‘home’.

The final article in this special issue is the most wide-ranging, in that it follows its protagonists, a group of Indian women on a European study tour in the mid-1930s, in stepping beyond the British Empire and shining critical light back on it. At a time of international upheaval, as Jane Haggis shows, the Geneva-based International Student Services offered Indian women opportunities to observe and interact with progressive European political and social activists. Significantly then, Haggis encourages us to decentre the metropole by following instead a route that begins with a steamship crossing from Mumbai to Venice. Tracing the women's impressions on their extended tour of Europe, including Britain, as recorded by one tour member, Kuttan Nair, in her published account, *A Peep at Europe*, Haggis proposes the lack of a 'unifying centre' that in turn unfolds to something much bigger: 'contact zones in a globality of capitalism and modernity'. These contact zones laid bare the empire to Nair and her fellow travellers as entrenching inequality, and cultivated their own sense of self as modern and political.

Viewed together, these articles all offer compelling examples of 'perspectival histories' that 'reconstruct networks ... [and] follow the traces of mobile people'.⁴⁷ But like recent critiques that reverberate across transnational, global and oceanic history, this attention to connections and movement is not to 'naturalise a space of exchange and interaction which is disconnected from hinterlands, the confined, the subjugated and the particular.'⁴⁸ The local still matters, and many of these articles starkly reveal the boundaries of belonging in specific locales, boundaries that individual mobilities might also work to reinscribe, rather than unsettle or challenge. The opening map orients us to colonial spaces writ large, but we have attended also to more intimate spaces, such as the home, the ship, and the courtroom. And yet, as Carey argues in her contribution, connecting local histories to histories and historiographies elsewhere can both provide new insights and amplify the importance of seemingly small and local sites, encounters and events. At many levels, such moves are empirically necessary.

Still, together these articles trace diverse circulations of techniques of governance and legal strategies, labour and capital, as well as a wide array of cultural, educational and religious concepts and knowledge. Their significance is not only as foundational to British imperial or settler colonial formations, but in ways that bring diverse colonies – as well as 'extra-colonial' territories, such as China – into the same analytic frame, exceeding the limits of single colonies or nations and of particular colonial 'types'. This provides a much-needed corrective in particular to work which approaches settler societies in isolation, even if within wide structurally comparative frames. It also offers a lens through which innumerable other movements and connections can be apprehended.

So to return again, by way of conclusion, to the map. Produced in the United States by the Map Department of the National Geographic Society, it demarcates the territorial claims of numerous imperial powers, yet we have lingered long here in the British (and its settler) empire. Scholarly traditions of comparative imperialisms would provide one pathway to thinking through colonial formations more fully in this region, to navigate projections of power from both sides of the ocean. Yet this would also be to reproduce the logic of the

⁴⁷ Ballantyne, 'Perspectival Histories', 234.

⁴⁸ Sujit Sivasundaram, Alison Bashford and David Armitage, 'Introduction: Writing World Oceanic Histories', in *Oceanic Histories*, ed. David Armitage, Alison Bashford and Sujit Sivasundaram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 19.

sovereignty and mandate boundary lines rather than the cable routes.⁴⁹ We might consider interactive and entangled imperialisms, to attend to the borrowings and mutual dependencies, as well as rivalries and frictions between colonies across a multifaceted imperial Pacific. An approach grounded, too, in the enduring and cross-cutting Indigenous sovereignties that have disappeared from this map. Looking forward, this might be another set of scholarly islands to connect.

⁴⁹ Or the steamship lines, see Frances Steel, 'Anglo Worlds in Transit: Connections and frictions across the Pacific,' *Journal of Global History*, vol. 11, no.2 (2016), 251-70.