

# National Centre of Biography, ANU

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## Biography Workshop

Ashley Barnwell

### **Keeping the nation's secrets: 'colonial storytelling' within and about Australian families**

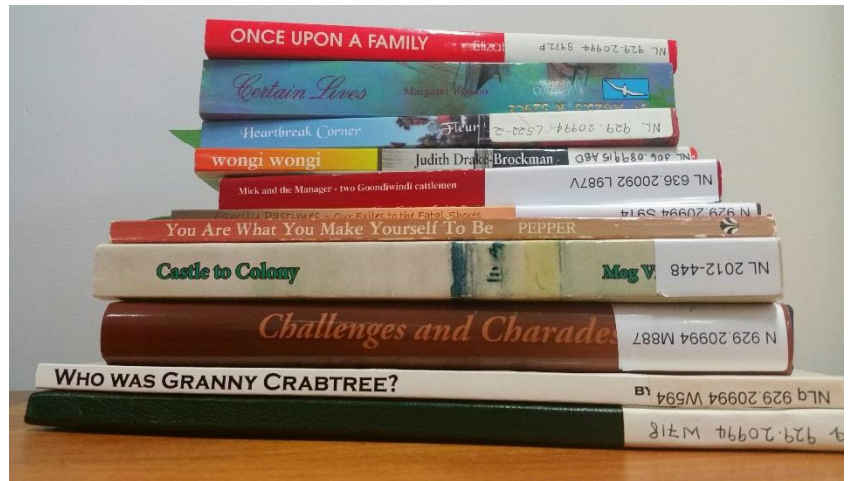
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Date: Thursday 27 June 2019

Venue: Jean Martin Room,  
Beryl Rawson Building,  
13 Ellery Cres, ANU

Time: 11:00 am until c. 12.30 pm

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*Selection of family history books in the National Library of Australia's collection (Barnwell, 2019)*

Recent studies of the 'genealogy craze' focus on how family historians appeal to ancestors to fashion their own identities, but 'doing family history' can also be a form of national identity work. In *Finding Eliza* (2016), Larissa Behrendt develops a notion of 'colonial storytelling', which outlines the social impact of retelling colonial narratives in the civic sphere. In this talk I will explore how her concept might apply to the stories told both within and about family histories, in a way that seeks to illuminate how family tales reproduce or challenge common knowledge of settler colonialism. To do this, I will draw from my own qualitative and archival research into Australian family histories, with a focus on self-published family accounts of 'settlement' in the print collection at the National Library of Australia. Using this material, I will ask: How do family narratives get told and retold across generations as a mode of 'colonial storytelling'? And how might inherited stories direct and transform the ways that everyday families think about colonial history over generations? Via an analysis of family historians' books, I will map the role that genealogical research can play in revising the memory that shapes both familial and national imaginaries. Overall, this work asks how the family might operate as a site for national truth-telling about the colonial past and its very present impacts.

ASHLEY BARNWELL is Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Her research focuses on the intergenerational transmission of memory, narrative, and emotion, and explores the role of life writing, personal archives, and literature in sociological research. Ashley is the co-author of *Reckoning with the Past: Family Historiographies in Postcolonial Australian Literature* (2018, with Joseph Cummins), and co-editor of *Research Methodologies for Auto/Biography Studies* (2019, with Kate Douglas). She is currently a Fellow at the National Library of Australia and a visiting scholar at the National Centre for Biography, ANU. In July 2019, she will begin an ARC DECRA project titled, 'Family Secrets, National Silences: Intergenerational memory in settler colonial Australia'.